

SEPTA NEWS



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Nicole Horowitz

Jane Hellberg

Welcome Back! Since the leisurely pace of summer already seems like ancient history, let's hit the ground running . . .

First and foremost on everyone's mind is the long awaited Bond Referendum. In preparation for the capital facilities vote on **October 25th** several public meetings of the board members, administrators, and the architects were held this past month. If you missed them, there are still two more opportunities to get the information needed to make an informed decision. The first is a Board of Education meeting on October 11th at 7:45pm in the Primrose café. The second is a community forum on October 17th at 7pm in the Primrose café.

Another item on all of our minds is Hurricane Katrina. Dr. Marien has been contacting superintendents in affected districts to facilitate a school-to-school donation program. For more details or to make a donation, contact Dr. Marien's secretary, Nancy Corrado at 277-2400.

Last year ended on a bitter-sweet note for us with the retirement of Special Services Director, Barry Whalen. Many of us in SEPTA had worked closely with Barry for many years and always thought he'd stay in Somers forever, or at least until we were all "graduated" along with our kids. But, after 18 years, it seems forever has come and gone.

Though he will be missed, the sun shone down again in Somers when we met and wel-

comed our new Director, Shelley Fleischmann. The enthusiasm and warmth we felt during our time with her left us looking forward to working with her to meet the needs of our special education students.

However, a little rain must fall. On September 30th we will bid the assistant director of special services, Alethea Schepperly, adieu. She is leaving us for a director of special education position in Monroe-Woodbury.

Alethea, we wish the best of luck to you, and thank you for all your work in Somers. You will be missed.

(Note: As of this writing we do not have any information regarding a new assistant director.)

Along with a new director, special services also has a new office. To make more classroom space available, special services has moved their offices, along with the district offices, to Bailey Court, building C.

And that's not all that has changed. Don't panic if you have only noticed two SEPTA meetings on the calendar, there will be others. To meet the various needs of our parents through meetings that provide speakers and networking we wanted some flexibility in meeting dates and times. Notices regarding meeting dates and topics will be sent out well in advance. If you have any preferences about topics and/or dates and times, now is the time to let us know. We can be reached by phone, e-mail, or drop us line in the SEPTA mail-

box c/o SIS.

Our first meeting will be on Thursday, **October 20th** at 7:30pm in the SIS library. Shelley will be joining us to meet everyone and speak about special services in our district. Our 2nd scheduled meeting is Tuesday, **March 14th**, also at 7:30pm in the SIS library. We have tentative plans to bring in social worker and frequent contributor to *SEPTA News*, Barbara Probst to talk about alternatives to the "disease" model of children's behavior.

One last change to bring to your attention - the distribution of *SEPTA News*. The job of copying the newsletter for general backpack distribution has become overwhelming. We will continue to post SEPTA News on our website for everyone to access. In addition, SEPTA members will receive the newsletter directly by indicating their choice of delivery options on the membership form attached to this newsletter.

Didn't I say we were running? But, finally, as we watch our children start off this school year filled with countless opportunities for their own growth and change, keep this, very wise, sentiment of Dr. Mel Levine in mind - *We are all born with a drive to produce; we want to show what we can do. Every kid would prefer to do his work and be praised for its quality as a part of a natural search for recognition and self-satisfaction. Therefore, when a student's work is poor or non-existent, rather than blame, we should wonder what could be obstructing his natural inborn inclination to produce.*

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MEETING DATES

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

- ① October 20 - Shelley Fleischmann
- ② November TBA
- ③ February TBA
- ④ March 14th - Barbara Probst
- ⑤ April TBA
- ⑥ May TBA

MESSAGE FROM SPECIAL SERVICES

Shelley Fleischmann, Director

As the 2005-06 school year begins, I am delighted to be joining you as Director of Special Services. Since assuming my new position, on August 1st, I have been warmly welcomed by both parents and staff.

Over the past few weeks, I met with parents, administrators, curriculum leaders, faculty and staff and chaired many CSE meetings. During this time, I experienced a very high degree of professional collaboration that is the hallmark

of this district. After spending time getting to know the people who work with your children I am eager to visit as many classes as I can, not only to see our excellent programs firsthand, but to also get to know your children.

Building relationships with parents, community members, students, faculty and staff is a priority of mine. Toward that end, I invite you to join me for what I hope will become an informal monthly get-together for coffee and conversa-

tion. I will host our first coffee on Wednesday, September 28th from 9:00am to 10:00am in the Conference Room at Bailey Court. Please RSVP to Anita Bader at 277-2453.

If you are unable to make it then, please be sure to join me at the first SEPTA meeting on October 20th at 7:30pm in the SIS Library.

I look forward to working with you to make this a successful school year for your children.

BOARD OF EDUCATION CSE APPOINTMENTS FOR 2005-06

Chairpersons

Appointed July 5, 2005

Shelley Fleischmann and Alethea Schepperly

Psychologists and Alternate Chairpersons

George Ferrigno

Wanda Grochowski

Sean Kennelly

Melissa Lam

Kathy Luzon

Cynthia Maloney

Teacher Representatives

Diane Acampora	Karin Daly	Carol Haber-Cohen	Danielle Ostrye
James Ambury	Keenan Deegan	Mary Jane Hales	Ellen Paul
Jodi Amaditz	Colleen Doherty	Liz Jolene	Marilyn Reagan
Fern Blackman	Lauren Domanico	Kathleen Kane	Patricia Sheehy
Karalee Calcagnini	Spyridodula (Lou) Doufekias	Sean Kennelly	Lorraine Stetson
Amy Carroll	Katy Faivre	Martha Levites	Robin Tepper
John Carroll	JoAnn Ferrigno	Douglas Ling	Carol Vadnai
Joan Cass	Robert Fischer	Lynn Linakis	Janna Varnum
Andrea Castellitto	Joyce Freeman	Michael McDonnell	Sharon Wiggins
Fredycca Cerussi-Muntz	Lucille Goldsmith	Tammar Merav	Danielle Zeolla
Elisa Cohen	Georgette Greason	Bryan Muller	
Cheryl Coniglio	Kim Gordon	Amy Novi	

Parent Representatives

Debra Aidala	Louis Gigante	Kimberly Shaw
Ellen Antonelli	Katherine Greczylo	Patricia Sisca
Candace Bertaccini	Laura Hanlon	Amy Solazzo
Linda DeSisto	Jane Hellberg	Mary Ward
Hillary Dettwyler	Lisa Immerblum	Julie Woogen
Richard Dettwyler	Rochelle Ruzan	

PROPOSED CAPITAL FACILITIES PROJECT

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

SOURCE: Somers Central School District

Q. What is the Proposed Capital Facilities Project?

A. The Proposed Capital Facilities Project is the result of two years of deliberations by the Somers Board of Education. This proposal is driven by the steadily increasing enrollment of students to the Somers Schools. The project calls for:

- a modest, four-classroom addition at Somers Intermediate School;
- a new classroom wing at Somers Middle School, plus the addition of an auditorium and music classrooms and some additional classroom renovations;
- a classroom wing at the high school, cafeteria/commons area, and a gymnasium, plus the conversion of two grass playing fields to turf fields;
- the relocation of a bus depot with parking to be built in the rear of the SHS/Primrose campus.

Q. What do the enrollment projections look like?

A. Over the past decade, district enrollments have increased by more than 1,000 students, from 2,218 in 1994 to 3,256 as of June 2005. Here's the 1994 to June 2005 enrollment summary:

School	1994	June 2005
Primrose	536	848
SIS	537	776
SMS	490	747
SHS	655	885
Totals	2,218	3,256

To date, enrollment increases have been the greatest at the elementary level; however, these higher enrollments are now moving through the upper grades.

As stated above, the proposed addition at SIS is modest (four classrooms) and is included to keep class sizes at reasonable levels. Demographic enrollment projections for SIS are:

04/05	Current	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10
776	816	842	889	901	903

SMS is already overcrowded and facilities are inadequate. The Proposed Capital Facilities Project plans (detailed below) would alleviate current congestion and accommodate space for anticipated enrollment increases. Enrollment projections for SMS indicate an increase of the number of middle school students from last year's 747 to 941 in the year 2012. (To put this in even greater perspective, this represents a near doubling of the number of students [490] at the middle school since 1994.)

Projections for the high school also indicate a doubling of enrollment from 1994 to 2014, when students are expected to number 1,317 (up from 655 in 1994 and 885 in June).

Q. What is the plan for our elementary schools?

A. While considering the long-term effects of enrollment growth in the district, the Board of Education has responded to the short-term need for more space at the elementary level. District offices have relocated to rental space at Bailey Court to open up space for four classrooms at Primrose. In addition, three existing rooms (a kindergarten cafeteria, conference room, and computer lab) have been reassigned as classroom space. To accommodate the need for more space at SIS,

our maintenance staff has partitioned three additional classroom spaces in existing common areas within the school. In addition, Special Services offices have relocated from SIS to rental space at Bailey Court to make way for more instructional space. Still, more room at SIS is needed, which is why the proposed Capital Facilities Project includes the addition of four classrooms there. The Board believes that these changes will accommodate the space needs at the elementary level for the short term, since incoming kindergarten enrollments are expected to stabilize.

The Board is intent upon proposing to the community only those solutions that will accommodate the district's space needs in a comprehensive way. The Board is not proposing further renovations to either of our elementary schools as it believes that the capacity at both schools and campuses is fully utilized.

The Board is sensitive to the fact that, according to research, the current and projected elementary school enrollments of 800-900 students are not conducive to optimum learning environments for young children. Further, the Board sees the need to alleviate overcrowded campuses (parking and recreational spaces) by acquiring additional property. Therefore, the district is continuing to look for available land, as the Board's long-term comprehensive facilities plan for the district is to alleviate overcrowding on our existing two campuses by obtaining land for a third campus that can possibly be used for an additional, two-grade elementary school.

At the same time, the Board is intent on moving ahead with proposed solutions at the secondary level, since these plans are in place and will assure that room will be ready in Somers Middle School and Somers High School in time to accommodate higher enrollments.

Q. What effect has overcrowding had on the instructional program at SMS, and what is included in the proposed Capital Facilities Project to resolve these issues?

A. As stated above, the enrollment projections for the middle school indicate that last year's 747 students will swell to 941 by 2012. The fact is that this student population is already overtaxing the current facility. For example:

- The need for small-group instruction spaces at SMS has increased dramatically due to state and federal special education mandates. While the middle school staff has been creative in finding space for these requirements, 18 of the small rooms currently used are windowless and undersized.
- Hallways are overcrowded - traffic on stairs is restricted to "up" or "down" to alleviate congestion, and students are restricted to certain times when they can access their lockers.
- The middle school cafeteria is overcrowded with more than 250 students eating in a very small space. In addition, outdoor play space is limited, and during inclement weather there is no place to house an indoor recess program without interrupting physical education classes in the gymnasium.
- The SMS band program, currently housed in a renovated space that formerly was the school's garage, fills that space to capacity with no room for growth for this popular program, which has substantially increased in enrollment through the years.
- The orchestra program shares practice space on the stage with the physical education program.
- One awkward situation for the middle school's burgeoning music program is that strings lessons are held in a closet-like space at the end of a second-floor hallway, adjacent to academic classrooms. This is where the elevator opens up, causing practice to stop and students to move their chairs to make way for custodians wheeling boxes and other items through their midst. (Continued on page 4)

PROPOSED CAPITAL FACILITIES PROJECT Q&A (CONT)

- Unlike the majority of middle schools in our area, Somers Middle School has no auditorium. Drama productions, events, and concerts are limited. In fact, they must be held at the high school, an awkward situation for practices and transporting students, props, costumes, and instruments. In addition, the high school auditorium is becoming increasingly overbooked as it is a venue not just for school events but for community events as well.
- The traffic congestion on the SMS/SIS campus during drop-off, pick-up, and special events is well documented. (See below about the proposed relocation of the bus depot to create a new drop-off area on the lower side of SMS that will separate the middle school traffic from the intermediate school traffic and thus relieve this dangerous situation.)

To relieve the above-detailed problems due to overcrowding at Somers Middle School, the Board has included the following in its proposed Capital Facilities Project:

- A one-story entrance addition, a two-story classroom addition, and a two-story music classroom and performing arts addition. This incorporates 10 general classrooms, 2 science classrooms, 1 music classroom (2 others are relocated and enlarged and will double as large-group meeting areas), 4 small-group instruction rooms, 1 technology/art room, a 625-seat auditorium, and an enlarged cafeteria and serving area. As stated above, the bus depot's relocation to the rear of the SHS/Primrose campus will provide space for the SMS expansion, adequate parking for SMS, and a new and separate drop-off, pick-up area for middle school buses and parents. The addition will accommodate assemblies, large class group meetings, music concerts, drama productions, and community use after hours, as well as relieve pressure on the high school and eliminate need to displace PE classes.

Q. What impact does the current and future enrollment at the high school have on that facility, and how does the proposed Capital Facilities Project address these issues?

A. Again, Somers High School housed 655 students in 1994. That number rose to 885 last June and is expected to grow to 1,317 by the year 2014. Space issues facing the high school include a need for additional classrooms to accommodate the increased enrollment, growing special education mandates, and state graduation requirements as well as an expanded range of Advanced Placement and elective offerings. The high school currently has limited space for class meetings, small assemblies, and special events; the cafeteria is currently too small for the high school population. In addition, gymnasium space is now tight and will pose a greater dilemma as enrollments grow. (Physical education is required of all students throughout their four years of high school; in fact, if they do not fulfill their PE requirements, students cannot graduate.) In addition to the need for gymnasium space during the regular school day, our athletic program practice and game schedule along with our community's athletic needs currently keep the high school's gym space overbooked. These activities take their toll on our outdoor field facilities as well.

To relieve the above-detailed problems due to current and future overcrowding at Somers High School, the Board has included the following in its proposed Capital Facilities Project:

- A two-story classroom addition at the rear of the building and a one-story addition at the front of the building, for a net addition of 13 general classrooms, 2 science classrooms, 1 music classroom, 5 small group instruction rooms, 2 art rooms, a health and wellness classroom, a 2-station gymnasium with bleachers, additional locker room space for the physical education program, a multipurpose commons cafeteria area that doubles as a lobby for the new gym and provides interior connections to the gym and auditorium for the school and community. In addition, the plan proposes to put a turf surface on two existing playing fields (including the field within the renovated track), in order to dramatically expand practice and playing opportunities for school and community athletic teams. This

solution is in lieu of an original proposal to add two more fields behind SHS.

Q. Why is the Somers School Board involved with relocating the privately held bus operation to land behind the high school and Primrose campuses, and has the Board considered potential environmental issues raised by this relocation?

A. While the operation of the buses is not directly owned by the school district, it remains in the school district's best interest to contract services from a bus operation that is located within the school district. Savings on route times and the price of gas alone explain the need for collaboration between our bus carrier and the school district. Further, by owning its own bus facility, the district has far greater leverage in negotiating contracts with transportation carriers. In such negotiations, the Board's top priority can be safety and cost-efficiency, not the availability of bus parking.

The property behind Primrose and the high school designated for the relocation of the bus depot will be thoroughly examined by our professional planners and the NYC Department of Environmental Protection authorities. The proposed facility will provide adequate parking and maintenance for 82 buses that transport 3,450 students to 36 locations, both within the district and out-of-district, as required by law. The plan will not disturb any existing wetlands, will be DEP-approved, and will abide by high standards for stormwater management. It will also be out of view and hearing of the community, which is not the case with the current facility on Route 202.

Q. How will the proposed Capital Facilities Project benefit the greater Somers community?

A. In addition to maintaining the high quality of the Somers Schools, which directly impacts the value of each and every home in the district, the proposed project will provide the community with a new auditorium space for programs and productions as well as increased athletic space (gymnasium and turf fields) for use by the ever-growing recreational teams in town. The relocated bus depot will provide quality of life enhancements for the neighborhood along Route 202 across from the middle school - not only in terms of noise abatement but of lessened traffic congestion as well.

Q. What is the timing of the proposed Capital Facilities Project bond referendum and how can I get more information about it?

A. The Somers Board of Education will present this bond to the community in a vote to be held on Tuesday, October 25, 2005, in the Somers Middle School Gym from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Prior to the vote, the district will produce several informational newsletters about the project and its impact and will hold public forums as well. For additional information, feel free to call the District Office at 277-2400 or the District Business Office at 277-2410.

Q. What is the cost of the proposed Capital Facilities Project?

A. The total cost of the project is \$53,437,891 million. This would have no impact on taxes in the 2005-06 and 2006-07 school years. If the current low interest rate environment remains, the district would phase in the borrowing of funds over a two-year period to minimize the impact to taxpayers in any one year and share the costs with those who will benefit most from future improvements. Currently, it is estimated that the annual cost of the bond to the taxpayer whose house is assessed at \$60,000 would be an average of \$258 per year over the 30-year life of the bond.

For more information about the proposed capital facilities project, including site plans and voter registration information, visit www.somers.k12.ny.us

UPCOMING PARENT & EDUCATOR WORKSHOPS

Bright Kids with Social Emotional, Sensory or Learning Issues: Putting the Pieces Together to Help Kids Instead of Labeling Them

Is your child quirky, inconsistent, challenging, extreme or eccentric? If none of the usual labels seem to fit, this workshop will provide a new framework for focusing on specific traits and finding strategies that actually help.

Presented by:

Barbara Probst, LMSW, a clinical social worker and adjunct professor at Fordham University.

Tuesday, October 18th at 7:00pm

C.E. Tompkins Elementary
8 Gerstein St., Croton, NY

Sponsored by:

Croton Harmon SEPTA

For information e-mail: chsepta@msn.com



Managing Life with a Challenging Child: Strategies for Tuning Problems into Solutions

Struggling to raise a "difficult" or "different" child can be overwhelming! If you sometimes feel frustrated, helpless, isolated, resentful, exhausted, discouraged or just in need of some practical help, this interactive workshop is for you. Topics include:

- ◊ Learning to help instead of push
- ◊ Empowering instead of fighting over power
- ◊ Pro-active strategies to prevent overload and meltdown

Presented by:

Barbara Probst, LMSW, a clinical social worker and adjunct professor at Fordham University.

Tuesday, October 25th at 7:00pm

Mildred E. Strang Middle School
2701 Crompond Rd., Yorktown Hts., NY

Sponsored by:

Yorktown Chamber of Commerce

For information e-mail:

staff@yorktownchamber.org



Family Resource Day

Westchester ARC is holding its 2nd Family Resource Day. Sessions will be held on:

- ◊ Guardianship
- ◊ Planning for the Future - Financial
- ◊ Planning for the Future - Services
- ◊ Educational Advocacy
- ◊ Sexuality
- ◊ Jobs and Career Planning
- ◊ Planning for School to Adult Transitions
- ◊ Residential Planning

Saturday, October 1st - All Day

White Plains High School
550 North St., White Plains, NY

Sponsored by:

Life Planning Center at Westchester ARC

For information e-mail:

rszur@westchesterarc.org

Registration is Required



Understanding Preschool Special Education

Parents of preschoolers with disabilities need support and information so they can help to ensure the future academic success of their children. This workshop explains:

- ◊ Federal and State regulations, including IDEA
- ◊ Parental rights under the law
- ◊ CPSE services
- ◊ The spectrum of programs and services available

This workshop will enable parents to work proactively with administrators and teachers in their school district.

Presented by:

Laurie Levine, Lower Hudson Regional SETRC Trainer and Staff of the Early Childhood Directional Center

For Information e-mail:

llevine@pnwboces.org

Registration is Required



Parents Helping Parents

This Support Parent training is designed to introduce parents to the Parent-to-Parent NYS program and to acquaint them with the role of being a volunteer support parent. A training manual will be provided to guide parents in helping other parents with similar experiences.

Wednesday, October 19th - 7pm-9pm

Westchester Institute for Human Development

Cedarwood Hall, Valhalla, NY

For information contact:

Jackie Stack - 914-493-2635 or
Laura Carfi - 845-877-6821X3927

Sponsored by:

Parent-to-Parent NYS and WIHD



Raising a Special Needs Child:

The Emotional Toll & Effective Coping Skills
Dr. Leonard Leiderman will discuss the stress and emotional issues associated with parenting a special needs child. He also will provide valuable insight into developing and implementing coping skills for parents, helping siblings to cope, and

seeking professional help appropriate.

Presented by:

Dr. Leonardo Leiderman, PhD, NYS licensed psychologist with St. Vincent Catholic Medical Center of New York

Monday, October 24th - 7:30pm

John Jay Middle School Library
Route 121, Cross River, NY

Sponsored by:

Katonah-Lewisboro SEPTA

For information e-mail: led-

dys@optonline.net



Understanding Your Child's Evaluation

Parents will learn how psychological and educational testing contributes to education planning. Topics will include:

- ◊ What are the components of a CSE evaluation?
- ◊ How are psychological & educational test results used?
- ◊ How does the CSE determine eligibility for special education services?
- ◊ How does the CSE set realistic & measurable goals for each child?
- ◊ How can parents be involved in the CSE process?

Presented by:

Patti Slobogin, PhD, SETRC Project Leader

and

Laurie Levine, Lower Hudson Regional SETRC Trainer

Monday, December 19th - 9:30am-11:30am

Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES
200 BOCES Dr., Yorktown Hts., NY
School Services Bldg. Front Conference Room

For information e-mail:

llevine@pnwboces.org



The workshops listed above are a partial list of parent and educator workshops being offered by the Special Education Training and Resource Center of the Lower Hudson Region (SETRC). Additional dates for the listed workshops, and other workshops being offered can be found in the SETRC Fall/Winter 2005-2006 catalog.

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

Please Note!!

For the rest of the year *SEPTA News* will be published only on our website www.somersptacouncil.org/SEPTA. However, SEPTA members have the option of receiving *SEPTA News* directly by indicating their preferred method of mail service on the 2005-06 membership form.

Get out! Popular dance Video game helps kids with ADHD

by Eric Sabo

The same video game that endlessly distracts kids from schoolwork may improve concentration and memory, according to a study on a small group of children with attention deficit disorder. Researchers found that playing 'Dance Dance Revolution,' the arcade hit from Japan where dancers try to match the steps of a gyrating computer animation, led to an intriguing boost in reading comprehension.

"We're still in the beginning stages," cautioned Tammy McGraw, an education specialist with the Appalachian Educational Laboratory and lead author of the study. "But if we can demonstrate that video games help, we can find solutions that do not require us to medicate children as much."

The game McGraw and her colleagues tested is a far cry from the gang violence found in *Grand Theft Auto* or the bloody martial arts action of *'Mortal Kombat'*. There isn't even any bumping or grinding. Available for such popular home gaming systems as Sony's PlayStation II and Microsoft's Xbox, 'Dance Dance Revolution' involves stomping on four large buttons to a danceable beat in what educators describe as a mix between *Twister* and *Simon Says*.

McGraw, who presented her findings at a recent Digital Games Research Association conference in

Vancouver, Canada, said that she first got the idea to study the game after seeing a long line outside a mall. Following the endless convoy of adolescents, McGraw was surprised to find what everyone was waiting for: a chance to shake it against a virtual dancer.

McGraw had recently read about research suggesting visual and rhythmic stimulation could improve reading and attention. Perhaps, she thought, this emerging theory about learning could be matched with the latest video game craze.

"There are a lot of ways to help kids read better," said McGraw, adding that few children find them interesting. "Kids naturally gravitate toward video games."

As part of the study, McGraw and colleagues recruited 62 sixth graders who suffered from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). First, the children were given a series of reading tests. Half the kids were then instructed to play 'Dance Dance Revolution' for about an hour a week. The other children continued with their normal routine.

Just to ensure that no parent was taken aback by the unusual educational aid, McGraw said they chose the Disney version of the game, which includes a dancing

Source: www.abcnews.go.com

Mickey Mouse and songs by Chubby Checker.

Three months later, the kids took the same reading tests again. The scores were largely the same for both groups, but those who played 'Dance Dance Revolution' did slightly better with so-called receptive coding skills, the ability to immediately recall a word or series of numbers. This type of testing indicates greater focus and attention, a key issue for children with ADHD. The more times the kids played the game, the better they did.

"This was the real hot spot," said McGraw. By quickly matching their movements to visuals and music, children who play 'Dance Dance Revolution' seem to strengthen the areas of the brain that are necessary for better memorization, McGraw explained. Since the game is exciting, these skills are more easily improved.

McGraw hopes to press ahead with her research to find a broader educational role for 'Dance Dance Revolution', as well as other video games.

"Everyone is playing them," she said, "And it's something schools can afford."

Legislation

Daylight-Saving Extension to Become Law

From National PTA's *This Week In Washington July 29, 2005*

Congress completed its work on a comprehensive energy bill, clearing the way for President Bush to sign the bill into law. Included within the bill is a provision that would extend daylight-saving time by a total of four weeks.

During the conference to work out differences between House and Senate versions of the energy bill, lawmakers agreed to begin daylight-saving time three weeks earlier, on the second Sunday in March, and extend it by one week to the first Sunday in November. The extension would begin in March 2007. The House adopted the conference report on the energy bill (H. Rept. 109-190) and the Senate voted to approve it. As part of the bill, Congress will call for a study on how much daylight-saving time actually affects oil consumption.

National PTA sent a letter to House and Senate conferees requesting the inclusion of a study of the ramifications of the extension of daylight-saving time on the safety of schoolchildren. National PTA understands and supports the need to conserve energy. However, the need to secure reductions in energy consumption must be kept in balance with the safety of our children as they go to and from school. While we are pleased that House and Senate conferees scaled back the original proposal to extend daylight-saving time in the winter months, we remain concerned about the potential safety issues the extension into March poses, as schoolchildren will be traveling to school while it is still dark.

National PTA adopted a resolution in 1974 opposing the extension of daylight-saving time into winter months due to the increased danger of traveling to school in dark hours.

Mercury Pollution

From National PTA's *This Week In Washington July 22, 2005*

National PTA joined a group of public health, education, and child advocacy organizations in sending a letter to the U.S. Senate addressing mercury pollution. The letter supports a resolution (S.J.Res.20) disapproving a rule promulgated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The rule at issue would remove coal and oil-fired electricity-generating utility units from the list of major sources of hazardous air pollutants under the Clean Air Act. Consequently, the current rules dealing with mercury emissions would change, and power plants would no longer be required by law to install strict controls in order to reduce their mercury pollution.

Power plants collectively produce 29 percent of the mercury pollution in the United States. Previous rules required them to reduce their pollution by 90 percent by 2008. Under the current rules, the EPA allows for a delay in these reduction plans until after 2026. The resolution against the EPA's proposed rule was sponsored by Sen. Susan Collins of Maine and Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont. A companion resolution (H.J.Res.56) was introduced in the House by Rep. Marty Meehan of Massachusetts.

Mercury is a significant neurotoxin that can impact brain, heart, and immune system functions. Developing fetuses and very young children are particularly at risk, and 1 in 6 women have enough mercury in their systems that should they ever become pregnant their children would be at risk. Low-level exposure to mercury as a fetus or very young child can cause learning disabilities, developmental delays, lowered IQ, and problems with attention and memory. Currently, 44 of the 50 states have posted fish consumption advisories due to mercury contamination of their lakes and rivers.

Senate Appropriations Committee Approves Education Spending Bill From: *This Week In Washington July 15, 2005*

The Senate Appropriations Committee approved its fiscal year 2006 (FY06) Labor-HHS (Health and Human Services)-Education spending bill on July 14, following passage of the bill by the Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee. The bill provides \$56.7 billion for education, an increase of \$132.2 million over the fiscal year 2005 level and nearly a half billion more than President Bush's original budget request. Following approval by the full Senate, the bill will move to conference, where members of the House and Senate will work to reach a compromise bill.

The Senate bill level-funds, or provides the same amount as last year for, TRIO programs (\$836.5 million) and the National Writing Project (\$23 million). The bill also provides \$1.309 billion for Perkins Career and Technical Education and \$306.5 million for GEAR UP

(Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs). The Senate bill increases funding for Arts in Education by \$100,000, to \$35.7 million; for Star Schools by \$200,000, to \$21 million; and for Civic Education by \$600,000, to \$30 million. It also level-funds the \$11 million Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education grant program. The president's FY06 budget proposal eliminated all of these programs except for TRIO. The House bill eliminated Arts in Education, Star Schools, Civic Education, and Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education.

In order to restore many of the programs the president had recommended be eliminated, core programs such as Title I grants and special education grants received minimal increases. Title I grants for disadvantaged students received \$12.84 billion, just \$100 million

more than in 2005. Special education grants to states received \$100 million more than in 2005, increasing its total to \$10.69 billion. If these funding allocations become law, the federal government's contribution to special education would decrease for the first time in a decade, from 18.6 percent of the total projected spending on special education to 18 percent.

National PTA staff is compiling a document that will outline the amounts allocated for each program by both the House and the Senate; that document will be available early next week. For more information about the Senate spending bill, refer to the press release of the Senate Committee on Appropriations, available at

<http://appropriations.senate.gov/hearings/markups/07-14-05PRLaborHFull.htm>.

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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.

TEACHER USES POTTER AS SCIENCE-CLASS TOOL

by Sue Lindsey

Source: *The Journal News* 7/8/05

When the students at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry fly off on broomsticks, most Harry Potter fans think "magic." Charlene Haviland thinks "aerodynamics."

Haviland, a middle school teacher in Norfolk, VA, will be teaching an after school remedial program for 8th graders that will combine reading with the study of science in the Harry Potter books.

The program at the inner-city school is being funded by an \$82,000 American Honda Foundation grant awarded to Haviland and George Plitnik, a physics professor at Frostburg State University in Maryland.

Haviland sought the grant, which includes enough money for lab equipment, after she was unable to find a model for a middle school class of this type. She asked for Plitnik's help because was familiar with the topic

He has taught the science in the Harry Potter books for two years, first as a small honors class and last school year as a course that attracted 90 students in both the fall and spring semesters.

"There's a lot of science that looks like magic," said Plitnik.

That very magic propelled Haviland onto her career path. As a part-time student at Southern Oregon University, she signed up for a class with a chemis-

try professor whom she found inspiring.

"He was always bumping into things and kind of absent-minded, but just extremely intelligent," Haviland said. "And he always brought in demonstrations. He wouldn't tell us how it worked, but for extra credit we could try to figure out what it was."

She started trying to solve the mysteries.

"I wasn't a stellar chemistry student, but I just got hooked," she said.

She, in turn, wanted to inspire others in the same way. As an undergraduate, she put on magic shows aimed at children, demonstrating - and explaining - chemical reactions.

She could make two clear liquids turn black. In some experiments, she could predict when the substances would change color, in others, the changes were unpredictable.

"I wanted kids to see that chemistry wasn't something that was scary, that it was really cool," she said. "When they go on to high school and have the option to take chemistry, maybe they'll go ahead and take it."

With the after-school science program, Haviland has an additional challenge: improving her students' reading and writing scores on state standardized tests. She chose the Harry Potter books because they have made page-

turners of children who don't normally like to read.

For a discussion on the flying broomsticks used in the game of Quidditch, Haviland said, "We can go into Bernoulli's principle and explore how we can take that form flying on a broom to ... how airplanes work ... and why some fly better than others."

While she originally wanted to use only Harry Potter, Haviland included other books in hopes of avoiding criticism from conservative Christian groups and others that believe J.K. Rowling's series promotes sorcery.

Haviland said her program should appease those worried about a witchcraft message.

"Here's the actual hard science behind it," she said.

Before Honda awarded the grant, a representative observed a class this spring in which Haviland read her students a Dr. Seuss book, *Bartholomew and the Oobleck*. She then made "oobleck" with cornstarch and a slimier substance, "gak," and had her students compare the two.

"The kids got involved, they were using science," said Donna Hammond-Cotton of Los Angeles, senior program officer with the Honda Foundation.