

# Special EDITION

## Mamaroneck-Larchmont SEPTA Mission Statement

Recognizing that students have a broad range of learning styles and abilities, SEPTA works to promote a quality learning experience for all children. SEPTA aims to promote a better understanding of children's learning differences and to be a resource for all parents.

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Special Education Parent Teacher Association

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*Dear Friends,*

We have been very busy this year with SEPTA programs, networking meetings, parent coffees and with our grant process. As always we have prided ourselves on providing our constituencies with informative, high quality speaker programs and we are gratified that the turn-outs have been great.

We hope many of you will join us for our remaining programs and events this year:

April 14, 9:00a.m. —"SEPTA Talks" - Join us at the Nautilus diner for coffee, treats and conversation—share ideas and questions you have about your child (general education or special education) and enjoy the support and suggestions of seasoned SEPTA parents

May 11, 7:30p.m. Charley Moskowitz will present on "Support for Siblings of Children with Special Needs" - 7:30PM in Hommocks library. The program will be preceded by the announcement and award of SEPTA's grants to faculty.

As we enter spring we are filled with optimism about the many positive things happening in our District and with SEPTA. We continue to work collaboratively with District administration and staff to share ideas and promote practices that benefit children with special needs. In this issue you will see many in-depth articles about a range of topics and you will see contributions by staff as well as our SEPTA writers. We hope that you gain some new information or better understanding from these articles. If you are interested in contributing to a future Special Edition, please let us know—we will your ideas and submissions. Email [Suzanne Prigoda](#) or [Amy Lieberman](#).

In addition to this newsletter, we frequently send out eNewsletters to members and friends. If you wish to be added to our mailing list, please email

[Cecilia Absher](#) .

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## SPECIAL EDUCATION—IDEA Stimulus Funds—an Update

As you may know our district received federal stimulus money—including approximately \$652,000 of IDEA stimulus funds over the past two years. The district was allowed and decided to transfer half of the funds to retain teachers who otherwise would have to have been terminated last year due to the budget situation. The District formed a committee comprised of over a dozen staff and several SEPTA parent representatives to discuss possible uses of the remaining \$326,000 of Federal Stimulus funds required to be spent in accordance with the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA). According to the U.S. Department of Education rules, these funds must be spent to enhance special education and to produce long-term benefits.

The Committee met on several occasions over the last year to discuss possible uses of funds, many of them suggested by District administration and staff. Dr. Anthony Minotti then recommended to the Board of Education, that stimulus funds be spent in the following areas:

- Retention of consultants to assist the District in furthering the effectiveness of its co-teaching programs in the elementary schools as well as the consultant teacher model at the high school;
- Assisting Hommocks staff in the area of math instruction for special needs students in a collaborative/co-teaching model;
- Acquisition of assistive technology evaluative tools and equipment;
- Acquisition of diagnostic assessment tools for evaluation of special needs for use by the special education department;
- Training of the speech and language department in PROMPT therapy;
- Transition planning evaluative tools to assist staff in developing appropriate transition plans and goals for students, starting at age 15;
- Fostering Positive Relationships—District staff attended a workshop with Dr. Jed Baker regarding social skills and competencies Dr. Baker has been working with staff (learn more—see pg. 9 and 12);
- Professional staff development for creation of an IEP goal bank, creation of a middle school skills curriculum, developing tools and methods of remediation of executive functioning deficits and Wilson reading training.

The District will be monitoring the use and impact of the funds and is required to file detailed accounting reports with the State. ###

### **New York Changes Law to Eliminate Use of the Term "Mental Retardation"**

**The Board of Regents voted to amend Regulations of the Commissioner of Education Relating to Students With Disabilities to change the term "mental retardation" to "intellectual disability," effective March 30, 2011. This will conform New York law to federal law. Relating to Students With Disabilities. The law also changes the name of the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities to the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities. These changes do not affect coverage. Eligibility, rights or coverage of legal protections. Learn more—[click here](#).**

## 10 Ideas for Advocating for Children with Special Needs

By Suzanne Prigoda

Whether parent, teacher or administrator, we all want what is best for all children, including, of course, children who have special needs. These children benefit when the adults who surround them work together to put the right program elements in place so that they can receive a great educational experience and to the fullest extent possible, meet the standards that are set for children without special needs.

Here you will find ideas for how you can become the best advocate for your student or child! As you use these ideas, you may come up with some of your own. If you do, please email them to [me](#) so that I can include them in an upcoming newsletter!

**Read the IEP** – And work to ensure it is implemented. Every word on those pages is important to make everyone better at helping the child meet their goals. If you do not understand something or a specific word, ask or look it up! We expect this of our children so we should do it too.

**Learn everything you can about the child's disability** – When you take the time and energy to stay current and knowledgeable about the child's disability, you will be in a better position to help that child make real progress in their environment. There are very informative websites and helpful organizations that can be consulted, as well as other teachers and parents!

**Learn your rights and responsibilities** – These are two extremely important and very different things. As a parent or a teacher, you have very specific rights and responsibilities.

**Be a good communicator** - This does not mean talk a lot. It does mean that everyone surrounding the child should be concise and clear in what they need to say about the child. From an aide reporting back to a teacher to a parent providing insight into the child, clear and direct communication is best.

**Ask questions and listen to answers** – Use the same 5w's we teach the kids: who, what, where, when, why and the non w, how to better understand why someone is making a recommendation or is taking a specific position.

**Identify problems** – Define them clearly and try to see them from all angles. It rarely helps to blame someone for the problem; being a collaborative problem-solver will benefit the child.

**Suggest solutions** - It does not matter where a good solution comes from - teacher, administrator, parent, child or specials teacher as long as it is recognized as a solution it should not matter. Be part of the solution and help make it happen.

**Do not let emotions get in the way** - We all take pride in doing a great job as a parent, teacher or professional worker. Any strong emotions should not interfere with the job at hand. No one should be on the attack or take things personally.

**Stay organized** – Prepare for meetings by reading reports, understanding test scores, knowing some options as well as understanding your rights and responsibilities. Keep a binder with all of the most recent information regarding the child (progress and achievement reports, correspondence, including emails and notes) .

**Write everything down** – Keeping written records will help you stay focused and organized so you can channel your energy into solutions and issues that may come up.

Also see our article on page 5 about Elementary Teacher's Conferences. See also the information and resources on the [SEPTA website](#).

**Music Within**  
*By Maya Kinsman*

I like to think of myself as having an open mind when it comes to differences in people. I also know that not everyone has an open mind to things that aren't necessarily 'the norm'. However, [while watching "Music Within"] I physically cringed at the treatment of Arti, and even Pimentel when he first arrived in the US from Vietnam. They were all good men at heart, with their own quirks, but the things that were really keeping them from being successful were the things that people magnified in their own minds, and that struck me. I know that most people who do not have anything that hinders them look down on those who do, but to be shown the amazing personalities of Richard Pimentel and Art i– even through an actor's perspective – was quite a different story. It struck my heart, because you got to know these people, these characters based on real people who had really lived through this and really done that, and then you had to watch others try to strip away any good facet of their person. It was heart wrenching because of all of that, but also because in the back of your mind you knew it was real or at least based on the truth. Real people. Real situations. Real feelings. Real feelings that strike a chord in anyone who has ever felt the slightest bit of rejection and as almost everyone in the world has felt such feelings, anyone can relate and feel something from watching the movie. I think that, because Richard Pimentel was feeling these concentrated feelings both first hand and through Art, that watching him become so dedicated with making things better for anyone with disabilities it is that much more pertinent. Watching the close-minded people attempt to kill the spirit that these men and women held despite the trials they had to go through because of a physical disability, makes me want to be just that much more open-minded about everything and everyone. ##

Maya participated in an essay contest sponsored by SEPTA as part of its program which featured a special screening of the movie, "Music Within", program last year. SEPTA extends its congratulations to Maya on her essay! Her reflections show the movie's impact on her and her desire to think differently.  
Thanks Maya!

## Preparing for Your Elementary Teacher's Conference

By Cecilia Absher

### It's that time of the year—Spring conference time! How do you prepare? What do you ask?

If things are going well and you have no concerns, the Spring conference may be a celebration of your child's success and the beginning of a conversation about transitioning to the next school year.

If however, your child is struggling or receives intervention services, special education or other supports, since you will not receive a report card until the end of the school year, you may find it important to inquire about a number of things to ensure that you have a full understanding of your child's performance and functioning and consider any steps you might wish to take in contemplation of next year.

What should you bring with you to the conference? Sometimes it is helpful to bring the prior report card as it can serve as a guide to ask how your child has progressed since earlier in the year. In addition, you may want to review the state's learning standards for the grade your child is in—what are students expected to learn and what evidence should there be? [Click here](#) to see the New York State Learning Standards. If your child has an Individualized Education Program ("IEP"), receives Academic Intervention Services ("AIS") or interventions through the Instructional Support Team, you should consider bringing any documents you have relating to those services and prior progress reports. You may ask that any staff providing services, in addition to the classroom teacher, also participate in your conference or have a separate team meeting.

We have compiled some questions you might want to consider asking during your conference. Of course as the meeting is typically about 20 minutes, prioritizing questions is important. In addition, it might be helpful to let the teacher know some of your questions in advance.

- 1) **General Questions.** What are my child's academic strengths and weaknesses? Is my child working to the best of his/her ability? What goals do you have for my child? Does my child show solid organizational skills—with materials and assignments and understanding the content presented? How can I help my child with any weaknesses?
- 2) **Progress.** What tools do you use to measure my child's academic progress? May I see the report or data showing what progress my child has made since

the beginning of the year against articulated District standards, or if there are none, against the state standards? Possible subject area questions:

- A) **Reading.** If you have questions about your child's reading, you might ask whether the teacher has conducted running records and to understand what they show or if a Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) report has been done. In addition, the District has developed a K-5 Reading Continuum Chart that shows how children are progressing in a number of areas. To learn more about the District's assessment tools for reading [click here](#).
  - B) **Writing.** The District has some tools, including a writing conventions chart that your teacher might use. To learn more about the District's assessment tools for writing [click here](#) and feel free to ask your teacher how he or she assesses writing and what progress your child has made.
  - C) **Math.** The District uses the TERC Investigations program which is aligned with the state math learning standards—[click here to access](#). You may want to ask how your child is doing in terms of meeting the standards—some of the standards relate to concepts and others relate to computational fluency. You may want to ask what assessments have been done to measure your child's progress and how he/she is doing compared to peers and the District's benchmarks.
- 3) **Social-Emotional.** It may be helpful to inquire about how your child is getting along in groups, showing flexibility, participating in discussions or projects, how things are going during less structured times, such as recess or in physical education. Is my child happy or does my child exhibit anxiety, shyness, or avoid certain types of work or interaction? Does my child demonstrate appropriate self-advocacy skills?

**Additional Thoughts:** If your child is struggling and has an IEP, you might consider requesting a team or CSE meeting to discuss your concerns. If your child is not receiving services or supports, you might want to ask the teacher and/or the school psychologist or principal what is available at school to help your child. Do you know: (1) Who is eligible for Academic Intervention Services? (To learn about AIS, [click here](#).) (2) What is an Instructional Support Team and when is one used? (To learn about the IST [click here](#).) or (3) How are children identified and evaluated to determine if they should receive special education or a Section 504 plan? (See pg. 17) ###

## We Know You Want to Help Children Succeed! SEPTA Wants You!

SEPTA's Nominating Committee is working to develop a slate of candidates to serve on SEPTA's executive board for next year. Serving on the Board is a rewarding way to be a part of SEPTA! Board members are directly involved in many impactful efforts and activities. The Board is comprised of parents, teachers and other staff—a dynamic blend of educators, experts and dedicated volunteers. We discuss substantive issues and work to continuously improve the educational experiences of children with learning differences or special needs.



If you are interested in learning more, please contact [Amy Lieberman](#) (552-1568), [Amy Kass](#) (834-3752) or [Kathleen Reale](#) (777-2907). ###

### SEPTA Awards Grants to Staff!

*By Liz Paras & Barbara Mehlman, VP Grants*

Thanks to SEPTA's fundraising efforts, SEPTA is able to fund several grants that will benefit and enrich the school life of special ed students and many regular ed students, too. To acknowledge the dedication, hard work, and creativity of this year's grant recipients, SEPTA will hold a ceremony on May 11<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 pm at the Hommocks Library prior to its speaker program that evening. These are the exciting projects:

**Literacy:** At Central: Susan Dinelli, Maggie Hoddinott, Ellen Wollner and Kelly Ann Trombley will purchase appropriately leveled, quality non-fiction texts for first graders. In addition, at Central, Alexis Longhitano and Jennifer Wiesner will purchase an interactive software program for grades 3-5, that provides high-interest non-fiction stories for every day of the school year. This will help struggling readers to improve fluency, vocabulary and comprehension while accessing interesting reading material.

**Speech and Language:** At Hommocks and Mamaroneck Ave. Ann Rushe, Janice Lancia and Maura Linkowski will purchase several communication boards and a Pixon Project kit, which focuses on teaching a small set of high frequency, reusable core vocabulary words. to provide students with complex communication needs with words used by typical children.

**Technology:** Cathy Mangieri and Mickey Mariash at Mamaroneck Ave. and Kathy Pilla and Maria Albano at Hommocks, will purchase two i-Pads for a pilot program with special needs students. This technology, which has many potential applications, will allow students to read and listen to a text simultaneously. It can be used at school during independent reading time for a specific assignment, or it can be sent home for the student to support his/her reading there.

**Social Skills:** Patricia Bevilacqua and Antonia Sgueglia at Mamaroneck Ave. will purchase "Giant Games" to continue to promote social skills on the playground during recess. This fits nicely with Dr. Jed Baker's "School Wide Social Skills Action Plan", and benefits both regular and special education students in all grades.

**Other:** All fifth graders in the district attended the "We The People" multisensory show, which supports the Social Studies curriculum.

Patricia Bevilacqua at Mamaroneck Ave. organized a Music Therapy After School Club for students with severe cognitive, language and sensory deficits who do not fit into other after school programs. The funds will help qualifying students pay for the program's tuition.

Congratulations to all of the grantees! SEPTA is so pleased to support your important work to help children with special needs succeed.###

## Special Education Mediation

*By Laurie Lee*

While surveys of parents in the District show that most parents are generally satisfied with the outcome of their Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE) and Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings, sometimes there are disagreements between parents and others on the CPSE or CSE team about various matters such as eligibility for special education, program placement, services, goals etc. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires states to have procedures for children with disabilities and their parents to guarantee them procedural safeguards with respect to the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE). As part of these procedures, each state must:

- ensure that parents are informed of their procedural safeguards;
- establish a mediation process to resolve disputes between parents and school personnel; and
- establish an impartial due process hearing procedure and implement a state complaint process.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) encourages parents and school districts to use mediation to resolve complaints regarding the education of a student with a disability. Mediation is also available for use prior to or simultaneously with the request for an impartial due process hearing. It may be used to resolve disputes involving any matter for which an impartial due process hearing may be brought; however it is not used for:

- decisions made at the sub-CSE level;
- discussions regarding attorney's fees; or
- placement in non-approved private schools.

### What is Mediation?

Mediation is a voluntary, confidential process which is facilitated by qualified, impartial mediators who have received some training in Special Education laws and regulations. Mediation must be made available at no cost to both parents and school districts. Costs are borne by the State Education Department (with the exceptions of attorneys' fees which are borne by the parties, and interpreters' fees whose cost must be borne by the school district). Mediations must be held at a neutral site that is convenient for both parties.

New York State law requires that all mediations be conducted by Community Dispute Resolution Centers. Forms to request mediation are available from the school district. After a request for mediation is made in writing, a request is sent to the local Community Dispute Resolution Center (CDRC) (there are centers that serve all 62 counties in New York State). The local CDRC for Westchester is Cluster Inc. in , Yonkers (963-6440 or [www.clusterinc.org](http://www.clusterinc.org)). The NYS Unified Court System Office of Alternative Dispute Resolu-

tion and Court Improvement oversee these Community Dispute Centers, which are independent non-profit entities. If the request in writing is made either to or by the District instead of directly to the local CDRC, the District will also send the request for mediation to the local CDRC.

### Why Do People Use Mediation?

Mediation brings parties together to work with each other to reach an agreement and all parties are involved in the decision-making process. The parties, not the mediators, make the decisions and craft the mediation agreement (in contrast to an impartial hearing at which the decision is made by an impartial hearing officer, and often one party remains dissatisfied). People use mediation when they want to avoid a more adversarial due process hearing, but still want to make sure that there is a neutral knowledgeable person to help facilitate communication. Although people may hire an attorney to be present at a mediation, they often choose the mediation process when they want to avoid attorney involvement.

When parents and educators work jointly to develop an agreement that they are in control of, the result is often one that leads to better understanding among the parties and a more satisfactory outcome. In addition, written agreements resulting from mediation tend to have higher rates of compliance. If an agreement is made through mediation, the agreement may be enforceable in court. If an agreement results in a change to a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), a state complaint may be filed if it is not being followed.

The majority of mediations do result in agreement; however, if an agreement is not reached, either party may still request a due process hearing or parents may file a formal complaint. While the mediation may have helped the parties to narrow the focus for an impartial hearing, the discussions that were held are confidential and may not be used as evidence.

To learn more about mediation and other forms of dispute resolution see the following:

[New York State Dispute Resolution Association](#)

[NYSED Dispute Resolution Memo](#)

**Note:** Information contained herein is believed to be accurate but it is not intended to be legal advice. Views expressed are those of the author, not SEPTA's or the District's. ###

## Tips for Book-Talking

by Christine Manzi and Martha Upton, Hommocks Reading Specialists

Parents are integral to the learning process. Speaking to your children helps them to better process the books they read (fiction, non-fiction, school texts and more) as well as the information they hear throughout the school day. While initial conversations may be challenging (we ARE talking about children here!), over time this kind of talk can become an important part of how you relate to your child and how your child will begin to relate to both books and you. These conversations should be pleasant and enjoyable...not a “grilling”. It might help for you to read a portion of the book. The following sets of questions could be used as prompts to facilitate an **on-going** conversation with your child:

### **When Starting a New Book:**

- What book are you reading?
- Who is in it?
- What is happening in the book now?
- Where is this story happening? When do you think the story takes place?  
(...you may even consider writing out the questions above and putting them near where your child reads so he/she can think about them while the child is reading...)

### **Two Days Later:**

- So, what else did you find out?
- What is happening now?
- What is going on with...character's name?
- What do you think is going to happen next?
- Why do you think character's name did what he/she did?
- What is the most important thing that happened so far? Why?
- Which character do you feel most strongly about? Why?

### **More Follow-up Prompts:**

- WHY?
- Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- Tell me more...
- Can you give me an example?
- What would you do if you were in that situation?
- What lessons can you learn from the story?
- How is the character feeling?
- Does the character remind you of anyone you know? Why?
- How does the time and place affect the story?
- What do you mean?



If a question emerges, go back together to the text and investigate! Look something up on-line to extend the inquiry...have some FUN! You can also use these questions to create a dialogue about your child's day at school or even a specific area of study.

You can find more ideas about reading at: [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org), [www.readingrants.org](http://www.readingrants.org), [www.guysread.org](http://www.guysread.org), and [www.genrefluent.com](http://www.genrefluent.com). ###

## Cyber-bullying

*By Hommocks Guidance Dept.*

Please read this if you are concerned with your child's use of technology. Please read this if your child has gotten upset over something written on the internet. Please read this if you do not know the difference between Facebook, Formspring, AIM, or Twitter. Please read this if you are simply a parent. If your child has not been affected by this, statistics show that most likely he/she will have at least one incident involving cyber-bullying during his/her middle school years.

As middle school Guidance Counselors, we face these issues everyday. Cyber-bullying and internet safety have been our "hottest topics" this year. A common report states that 97% of middle-schoolers are impacted negatively through electronic media. Adolescents use technology far more than they ever have before, and in alarming ways. While electronic media may be advantageous, it has become a forum for anonymous and non-personal interactions that can often be mean or hateful. This can perpetuate a negative and damaging situation.

As parents, it can often be difficult to navigate and intervene in an effective way. With the rapid technological advances, it is getting more and more difficult to keep up with the "popular" websites, and here are some tips to help you:

- Talk to your children about the Internet. Ask them what their favorite websites are, how they use the internet, etc. The more your children speak with you, the less likely they are to get in trouble online.
- Formspring is a completely anonymous website where anyone in the world can write negative things about your child. This has caused a variety of problems within Hommocks, and we have been encouraging our students to delete those accounts altogether. The impulsiveness and negativity that is allowed by Formspring can be dangerous for pre-teens.
- Have access to all of your children's internet accounts and monitor them frequently.
- Encourage your children to limit who they shares their email address and cell phone numbers with.
- Discuss the importance of never revealing social networking-site passwords with others, even with best friends.
- Your child should NOT respond to a bully's electronic messages, but SHOULD always save them and share them with a trusted adult.
- Limit "technology time," and encourage the use of "traditional" forms of communication

Technology can be a fantastic tool when used correctly. With education and awareness, we can balance the usefulness of the internet with keeping our children safe.

For more information, visit [www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov).

*Note:* The Mamaroneck Schools Foundation has awarded a grant to Hommocks and the High School to address cyber bullying (see [www.cybersmart.org](http://www.cybersmart.org)) and the Board of Education is poised to adopt an anti-bullying policy that would include cyber-bullying.

**JCCA Compass Project**  
**Helping High School Students and Parents Navigate Post Secondary Issues**  
*By Amy Lieberman*

Last year I attended a ‘*Colleges with a Difference Fair*’ sponsored by Pleasantville SEPTA. Guest speakers were from the Jewish Child Care Association of New York’s program called the Compass Project, which has two primary foci: (1) to help families with children with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and Section 504 plans transition from high school and (2) to support students registered with the Office of Disabilities with coaching on college campuses.

Started 17 years ago on Long Island and now with offices in Westchester, the Compass Project works with teens and young adults between the ages of 14 and 25 with special needs, and their families, focusing on educational and career directions. How is this done? The Compass Project provides counseling/coaching, career assessment and guidance, and coaching on a one-to-one basis. There is a particular emphasis on preparing for self-advocacy, vocational skills and post-secondary choices.

Relating to the transitions after high school, parents find themselves asking:

- ◆ Should my child go to college (whether a two- or four- year college) or begin thinking of other choices?
- ◆ Should my child go away or would he/she benefit from a local college experience?
- ◆ How can my child meet the demands of college without the same depth of support often experienced in high school?
- ◆ How will my child manage without the daily support of his or her parents?
- ◆ Is my child ready for college: are his/her interpersonal and skill-care skills sufficient?
- ◆ What can we do as parents to ensure the best chance for success?

The professionals at the Compass Project assist with the unique challenges of graduating and use a “not one shoe fits all” model with respect to post-high school options. Some students might benefit from working, going to trade school or traveling. Each student receives an individualized plan.

Furthermore, the Compass Project prides itself on helping both high school and college-age students find internships for the summer or during the course of the school year. There is no guarantee of an internship but with the help of the community, parents and other agencies, the Compass Project has a pretty good track record. Last summer seven students were placed in industries of their interest.

The Compass - Bridges Project - is one tier of the Compass Project providing a comprehensive support program for college-age students on the Autism - Asperger’s spectrum as well as those with other verbal or non-verbal learning disorders. Bridges, as a whole, offers individual and group support services that include academic, social, vocational, independent living, and recreational activities.

Bridges is on many college campuses in our area: Adelphi, CW Post, Long Island University, Queensborough Community College, New York Institute of Technology, Pace University Manhattan, Fashion Institute of Technology, Manhattanville College, and SUNY Purchase. At the college level, Bridges aims to work on these quality of life goals:

- ◆ Progress in school/career
- ◆ Developing a network of peers/social relationships
- ◆ Time management issues: balancing the academic workload, work and play
- ◆ Individualized career assessment to determine a college major
- ◆ Addressing roommate/dormitory issues
- ◆ Deciding whether to live away from home or commute
- ◆ Learning to live independently
- ◆ Life after college, which is why internship placement during the college period is vital.

The range of services varies at each college so parents need to do their homework to find out what is available at respective colleges. For more information, kindly contact Jenny Frank, Coordinator of the Compass Project/Westchester at 914-761-0600 x 225 and or frankj@jccany.org and Jennifer Eisman, Coordinator of Bridges/Westchester at 914-761-0600 ext. 229 or eismanj@jccany.org. ###

## Building Positive Relationships by Teaching Social Skills

*by Suzanne Prigoda*

Learning how to do and say the right things can be challenging for anyone. In one day, you can have many roles and you have learned how to “behave” and what language to use in these many roles. For instance, you are taking the train to work. You sit quietly, read your work or the paper waiting to arrive at your destination. After work, you have to attend a school presentation where again you sit nicely and listen and learn, perhaps taking notes. Following that presentation, you have decided to have a dinner with a friend and meet at a local restaurant and you laugh, talk and have a great time.

You have learned the right social skills to use in each of these different settings. For some, these skills are learned more easily and naturally. But for others, these skills are not easily learned but are necessary to success in school and life. “We know effective social skills are fundamental to smooth relationships and interactions. We also know how to support the development of social skills in children with and without disabilities. Effective social skills programs reflect, and draw upon, the resources of a school community and respond to the needs of individual students. Social skill interventions start with accurate diagnosis and continue by allowing students to practice positive social interactions in a step-by-step, decision-by-decision fashion.... An effective intervention proceeds [with] a team of experts, with input from parents and families, identifies a social skill deficit, chooses a strategy specific to the child and the situation, and continually monitors and evaluates the child’s progress...” This is important because, “there are many children who struggle daily to communicate and make sense of their social world. As an education community committed to the success of all students, we must help these children build the social skills they need to succeed in school and in life.” (Source: Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education (“OSEP”) via National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities)

It is clear from all the research, for kids who have challenges or difficulty learning social skills, they need to be *taught* – this is what school districts across the country have realized and are now addressing as an integral part of the teaching process. Our district has courageously taken on the task of systematizing the process of teaching social skills in all of the schools, targeting that building’s unique needs. This multi-pronged initiative, “Building Positive Relationships” provides for many initiatives including training teacher aides, establishing a peer buddy program, conducting classroom lessons on sensitivity, and holding parent workshops. The building specific plans are outlined in detail on the district website at <http://www.mamkschools.org/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectiondetailid=4582&>.

Here are a few highlights from each of the buildings’ plans:

School Building	Building-Specific Objective(s)
Central	To improve and enhance student interactions during free play opportunities. (See article on page 13—”Peaceful Play”)
Chatsworth	To increase the sensitivity of students to learning and behavioral differences and teach strategies to promote a community of learners. Our work will target our co-teaching classes where there is a wider range of learning, social and behavioral needs. Progress will be measured through data collection from student, teacher and aide surveys and anecdotal observations.
Mamaroneck Ave.	To help promote the integration of our special needs population into the mainstream classes during unstructured times.  To support and train the paraprofessional staff to better facilitate social interactions during recess.
Murray	To continue to promote positive peer interactions with our identified students with social cognitive deficits in structured and unstructured environments.
Hommocks/ High School	Develop a social skills program in both the middle and high school settings for individual students as needed and a select group of students in 9th grade and in the TASC program at HMX.

### Building Positive Relationships, *Cont'd*

To help guide staff and parents in the implementation of this critical initiative, the district used federal stimulus funds to bring in Dr. Jed Baker as a consultant to the schools. “Dr. Baker has become intimately familiar with the culture at each one of our neighborhood schools and the various ways in which we have been working for several years to facilitate social interactions,” said Dr. Anthony Minotti, Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services, Personnel and Administration. “His work in the district will provide the framework for a continuum of social skills services that are custom-tailored for the specific situations to foster positive relationships among all children.”

An important piece of Dr. Baker’s work is helping schools bridge the gap between typically developing kids and special needs kids. While special needs kids usually don’t benefit from a one-size fits all approach, many of them do well with a peer buddy system. The program is designed to help kids who often don't fit in navigate the social scene and those who typically do fit in learn how to reach out to others in need.

Last year, Dr. Baker met with staff and led a parent workshop on managing challenging behaviors in children, including preventing meltdowns. This year’s workshops are intended to be even more interactive with an update on training in the District and plenty of time for Q&A and specific strategies for helping children build social skills.

If a parent believes his/her child needs additional supports for the development of appropriate social skills, the parent may contact the child’s teacher(s) and/or the school psychologist to discuss the child’s needs and what steps can be taken to determine the appropriate steps to be taken to assist the child.

#### **Additional resources and information:**

[NICHY’s Report—Social Skills and Academic Achievement](#) - this report provides in-depth insight into what social skills are and how to implement with IEP team (funded by USDOE)

[NYSED Survey of Social and Emotional Development and Learning Practices](#) in NYS Schools — Survey of District and School Educators and Partners Office of Student Support Services New York State Education Department

**Jed Baker, Ph.D.** is the director of the [Social Skills Training Project](#), a private organization serving individuals with autism and social communication problems. In addition, he writes, lectures, and provides training internationally on the topic of social skills training and managing challenging behaviors. He is an award winning author of five books, including *Social Skills Training for Children and Adolescents with Asperger’s Syndrome and Social Communication Problems*; *Preparing for Life: The Complete Handbook for the Transition to Adulthood for Those with Autism and Asperger’s Syndrome*; *The Social Skills Picture Book*; *The Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond*; and *No More Meltdowns: Positive Strategies for Managing and Preventing Out-of-Control Behavior*. His work has also been featured on ABC World News, Nightline, the CBS Early Show, and the Discovery Health Channel. ###

**SEPTA wishes to thank all staff who are retiring this year for their many years of dedication and service to children, especially those with special needs. We hope the next phase of your life is most Enjoyable and rewarding! We honor all of the retirees:**

**Darlene Adams, Martha Barylick, Alice Browne, Gina Bruno, Lucille DeFrancesco, Theresa Donnellan, Kathleen Donnison, Allen Falber, Karen Fletcher, John Fredricksen, Lona Greenhouse, Margery Gasthalter, Joan George, Marjorie Gross, George Hebron, Barry Koski, Nicholas Kourabas, Jeanette Larva, Barbara Marchewka, Barbara Merling, Jon Murray, Alexander Romanov, Roberta Sanders, Patrice Schwartz, Nancy Stamegna and Joan Stern.**

## Peaceful Play: Focus on a Positive Recess Experience for All

By: Joanne Hindley, Assistant Principal, Central School

Recently, a parent, rushing to bring a forgotten lunchbox to her child, commented on the playground scene she passed as she drove into Central School's parking lot. "Oh, to be young again – it looks like such fun out there." That of course is exactly what our goal is for recess – for our students, during their somewhat brief opportunity to venture into the great outdoors, to have fun. However, what can appear to the average passerby to be a casual situation involving a large group of children running and playing is actually a well orchestrated scenario that requires much preparation, organization and delicate care on the part of the adults in charge.

For certain children, recess is the most challenging part of their school day. Sharing, turn-taking, problem solving – skills that may come easily to some, can be hard learned for many others. Often times the adults in charge find themselves doing a delicate dance, making quick decisions about when to intervene in a situation and when to allow students to handle something on their own and learn from the experience.

This year at Central School, a successful play experience during recess is a major objective for our staff. Our goals include greater inclusiveness and engagement of students during play opportunities and an increased ability for students to negotiate conflict and initiate play with peers. We've worked towards these goals utilizing a multi-pronged approach which involves many members of the Central School community and beyond.

Jed Baker, the director of The Social Skills Training Project, has been working alongside us in helping to establish an effective plan towards realizing our recess goals. His program is recognized as one of the most effective in the country for teaching social and emotional skills. Early in the school year, Jed presented at one of our faculty meetings and prompted a lively discussion regarding possible sensitivity lessons to conduct in classrooms in addition to some tips on how to increase positive interactions during recess. He next met with our school aides who are the adults most responsible for our children during lunch and outdoor play. Jed listened intently to their thoughts and concerns and helped them brain storm possible solutions to predictably tricky recess situations. He suggested some structures for playtime that would engage more students and offer more variety for those who might not be interested in the typical sports activities that take place. He also reminded us of the "oldies but goodies" – games that many of us played as children, don't require much equipment and could easily be set up as play "stations" in different areas of our outdoor space. Reminders of *Red Light*, *Green Light*, *Mother May I* and *Spud* generated much chatter and evoked fond memories for many of us in attendance. In this age of technology and organized activities after school, many children have never been introduced to these well-loved pastimes. Our physical education teachers agreed to meet with the aides to review the rules of play and to dedicate some physical education class time to teaching the games to all students. These play stations are now set up in various parts of the playground, facilitated by an adult and periodically rotated for variety.

Jed Baker also introduced us to the concept of peer buddies. Each week, two students from each class are assigned this important role. Their job is to help the school aides facilitate play stations and to be on the look out for children who may be on the outskirts during recess and might need gentle encouragement and an invitation to join in with their peers. Recently we included additional choices for students during recess. Through the generosity of our PTA, we were able to purchase giant yard games which are incorporated into additional play stations. Children may choose to play Jenga, Connect 4, Pick-up Stix or chess and checkers using extra giant pieces designed for large group play.

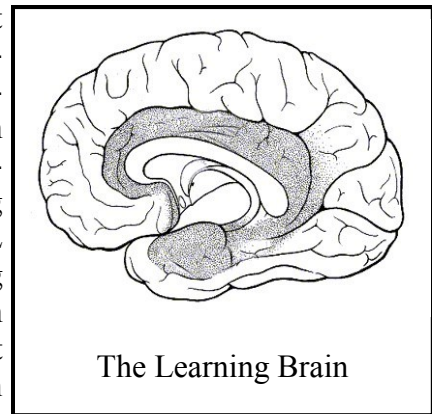
Our efforts to improve social interactions during recess have been successful thanks to the commitment of many members of the Central School community. We would like to acknowledge the support of SEPTA and the District's stimulus committee in affording us the opportunity to work with Jed Baker who will continue to play an integral part in this ambitious effort. Working towards our goal of a more pleasurable recess for all has reinforced our thinking that with a few tweaks and some enthusiasm, recess can be a positive part of the school day - allowing kids the opportunity to run around, gain confidence, learn teamwork and create bonds that last beyond the classroom.

###

## Universal Design for Learning

*By Karen Gatto, Director of Secondary Special Education,  
Dr. Andrew Hess, Coordinator—of Assistive Technology & Suzanne Prigoda (Parent)*

What is Universal Design for Learning (UDL)? It is a scientifically based set of principles for designing curriculum and instruction that provides all individuals with equal opportunities to learn. Essentially, it is not just a single, one-size-fits-all solution but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs. IDEA defines it as, "...a concept or philosophy for designing and delivering products and services that are usable by people with the widest possible range of functional capabilities,...". UDL works in tandem with the concept that disability is defined by the relationship between an individual and his/her environment. As such, altering the environment can disable or enable students' learning. UDL allows all students access to content and facts while engaging them to ask questions, find information, and use that information effectively. Research has even shown that all students benefit from UDL; students with specific disabilities, those with English as their second language and those considered gifted and talented.



There are three guiding principles of Universal Design for Learning that parallel three distinct learning networks in the brain, reflecting the ways in which students take in and process information: *recognition* which is referred to as the "what", *strategy* which is referred to as the "how", and *affect* which is referred to as the "why":

Principle #1: "The What" – Provide multiple means of representation to access information, concepts and ideas. How we gather facts and categorize what we see, hear, and read. EXAMPLES: Teacher websites, larger type, books on tape, books scanned into a computer.

Principle #2: "The How" – Provide multiple means of action and expression. How we organize and express our ideas. Writing an essay or solving a math problem are strategic tasks. EXAMPLES: handwriting an assignment, utilizing voice recognition to type out a story or having dedicated laptop for all work.

Principle #3: "The Why" – Provide multiple means of engagement in learning. How learners get engaged and stay motivated. How they are challenged, excited, or interested. These are affective dimensions. EXAMPLES: using math games on computer to stay involved, using websites to demonstrate lessons (e.g. seeing animated heartbeat, etc.) allowing follow through at home.

Using UDL, educators can improve outcomes for diverse learners by applying these principles to the development of goals, instructional methods, classroom materials, and assessments. And while clearly technology provides one of the most obvious means of changing instruction and engaging students via digital learning formats, there are a variety of additional ways that UDL can be incorporated into education, such as the following:

**Universal Design for Learning** *Cont'd*

**Building accessibility into design** helps to ensure that features meeting the needs of the widest range of students are incorporated integrally into the curricula. Such designs can prevent the need for adaptations or retrofitting. For example, electronic curricular material that is designed to be compatible with assistive technology devices allows paraprofessionals, parents, or teachers to more easily program these devices with appropriate content.

**Providing adaptable materials and media** allows students to choose and customize formats suited to their learning needs. For example, using digitized text, students can change text to speech, speech to text, font size, colors, and highlighting. Digitized materials also can support students through built-in scaffolding to assist with activities such as word recognition, decoding, and problem solving. There also are non-digitized materials, such as highlighted passages or overheads that can provide support to students.

**Using multiple media**, such as video and audio formats, provides a variety of ways to represent a concept and allows students to access the materials through different senses. For example, computer-based simulations that include video description can help students with and without disabilities to visualize difficult concepts. A more low-tech example might be using a book with large print or providing books on tape for students.

**Providing challenging, salient, and age-appropriate materials** to all students motivates students who may not otherwise be able to access curricular content they need given their age and developmental level. For example, a student with a learning disability can use decoding supports and text-to-speech features incorporated into digitized history or science books, enhancing his or her ability to access grade-level content.

**Presenting information in multiple, parallel forms** help to accommodate diverse learning styles. For example, information can be presented orally in a lecture, visually through pictures or readings, kinesthetically through a model demonstration, and using technology-based programs that further allow students to interact with the concepts. (Source: OSEP)

*In Mamaroneck, teachers have been using some of the tactics of Universal Design for Learning for many years and now there is a focused effort within the district to help disseminate important and relevant information on how teachers can leverage these strategies and tactics even more. While there are many examples to cite, the following will provide some insight into some of the more recent efforts:*

- **Strategy implementation to address issues of executive functioning:** Dr. Lydia Soifer of *The Soifer Center* has been working in the high school providing teachers with insights and ideas on how to work with students who have executive functioning challenges. Dr. Soifer's work compliments other work around further development of grades 6-12 Skills Curriculum with teachers from both Hommocks and the High School aiming for a skills curriculum as a final product with accompanying lesson plans and activities.

**Universal Design for Learning** *Cont'd*

- **IEP Goal Committee**: A new committee has been actively engaged on creating a bank of measureable goals that will align with our study skills work and our life skills curriculum. These efforts should yield more comprehensive IEPs that will provide the ability to prioritize the specific skills that our students need in order to be successful in mainstream settings.
- **Co-teaching Development**: Consultant Ken Westerman, from *Goldmansour and Rutherford LLC*, worked diligently with special education and math teachers in 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades to develop their skills around the co-teaching strategies of parallel, alternative, station, and team instruction in math classes. These included: how to effectively work with children in small groups, how to differentiate throughout the school day, and how to create visual supports and adapted materials to allow all children to successfully access the curriculum.
- **SOLO Literacy Suite**: SOLO is a suite of four of the most common reading/writing supports: a text reader, graphic organizer, talking word processor, and word prediction program. The district has purchased a universal license, which allows this suite to be installed on all computers in the school and at home, and is currently training turnkey teachers. The provision of this customizable, multifaceted set of reading/writing tools for all students is a tangible expression of the district's commitment to the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

If you would like to learn more about Universal Design for Learning, be sure to visit some of the websites listed below. The U.S. Department of Education has provided a great deal of information for parents, teachers and administrators to access so do not be shy! Simply copy/type these addresses into your URL and begin! Remember that these sites are supported and/or funded by the US Department of Education. As you research, also consider sending additional resources or ideas you may have to [Suzanne Prigoda](#) so we can make them accessible to all! A good place to start learning more is this [short video](#) on UDL: Enjoy!

[National Center on Universal Design for Learning](#) - here you will learn more in depth information regarding the principles and even find free websites supporting each principle and how they can be used in the classroom.

National Center for Learning Disabilities - here you can print out a [Parents' Guide to UDL](#).

[EnACT - PTD](#) - this is a great website that supports post secondary students with disabilities in attaining their educational goals.

[National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials](#) - This site serves as a resource to state- and district-level educators, parents, publishers, conversion houses, accessible media producers.

[Office of Special Education Programs \(OSEP\)](#): Here you will find the US Dept. of Ed Tool Kit on UDL. ###

**Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) vs. Section 504—What’s the Difference?**

*by Deb Ezbitski*

If your child receives special education, he or she has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) — this is as a result of a determination by the Committee on Special Education (CSE) that your child meets the definition of a “child with a disability” as defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The IDEA is the federal law designed “to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.” The IDEA, however, is not the only federal law that protects your child’s right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (“Section 504”) and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (as amended in 2008) (“Title II”) also apply. And your child’s IEP should meet the requirements of all of these federal laws.

If your child once had an IEP, but has been “declassified” because the CSE determined that your child no longer needs special education services, IDEA no longer applies, but Section 504/Title II of the ADAAA might well still apply. If after an initial evaluation the CSE determined that your child was not eligible to receive special education under the IDEA, your child may still be considered an “individual with [handicaps]” as defined in Section 504/Title II or the ADAAA and entitled to the protections of those laws. And if a child is found eligible for special education services under IDEA, but the parents refuse to consent or revoke their consent to the delivery of special education services, that child as well would be entitled to Section 504 protections.

Because of this broader applicability of Section 504/Title II of the ADAAA, it is important that to be aware of the protections to a free appropriate public education it provides all students. Those protections include many of the accommodations frequently provided for in an IEP, such as extended time on tests or assignments, assistive technology, a behavior intervention plan, preferential seating, enlarged print, oral tests, visual aids, frequent breaks and a modified class schedule, among others.

It is also important to understand that IDEA and Section 504 differ from one another in some important ways, including how ‘disability/handicap’ is defined, which school personnel is involved in the assessment and decision-making process, and what procedures a school must follow to comply with each law. Probably the most general, yet significant difference between IDEA and Section 504, from a parent’s perspective, is that under IDEA, parents are directly given legal rights & responsibilities to participate in a well-defined process for ensuring that their child receives a free appropriate public education and a formal plan called an IEP is created which describes specific goal and objectives and the specialized services, instruction and accommodations the child will receive. Section 504/Title II of ADAAA does not grant parents similar rights to be included in the process to determine what accommodations will be made to ensure that their child receives FAPE. As a result, parents are required to be informed and proactive to a greater degree than under IDEA.

**Differences in the meaning of ‘disability / handicap’:** Under IDEA, the meaning of a “*child with a disability*” is narrowly defined and requires that a child have at least one of thirteen specified impairments and, by reason of the disability, need special education and related services.

## Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) vs. Section 504—What’s the Difference? Cont’d

In comparison, Section 504 provides that: “No otherwise *qualified individual with handicaps* in the United States...shall, solely by reason of her or his handicap, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance...” Its purpose is to protect individuals from discrimination and entitle children with disabilities, to the greatest extent possible, and opportunity to fully participate with their peers in receiving a free appropriate public education. Section 504 is a broad civil rights law that applies to students and other individuals with disabilities, including parents, and school district employees.

Under Section 504/Title II of the ADA, a ‘*qualified individual with handicaps*’ is one who (1)-has a physical or mental impairment (2)-that poses a substantial limitation (3)-on a major life activity. ‘Major life activities’ include those most commonly thought of in this context – seeing, hearing, walking, speaking, eating, performing manual tasks, caring for oneself – as well as those more difficult for others to perceive, such as major bodily functions (e.g., functions of the immune system, normal cell growth, or digestive, brain, or circulatory functions); learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working are also considered ‘major life activities.’

‘Physical or mental impairment’ is also defined broadly and includes any physical disorder or condition, disfigurement, or anatomical loss affecting one’s physical body, or any mental or psychological disorder, such as intellectual disabilities, emotional or mental illness, and specific learning disabilities. And again, this definition covers those impairments most commonly thought of in this context, such as blindness, deafness, or the inability to use one’s arms or legs, as well as those more difficult for others to perceive, such as dyslexia, ADHD, asthma, and diabetes. Temporary medical conditions from illness or injury (e.g., a broken arm) may also be considered an impairment, as determined on a case by case basis.

In order for Section 504 to apply to a student with a ‘physical or mental impairment’ that impairment must ‘substantially limit’ a major life activity (as described above). The term ‘substantially limits’ is also to be interpreted broadly and inclusively, and without considering the effect of any measures taken to minimize the limitation or mitigate its affect, such as the use of medication, prosthetics, hearing aids, assistive technology, or learned behavioral or adaptive neurological modifications. So, for example, Section 504 protects the student with a hearing-impairment even though the student uses a hearing aid, because without it, a major life activity would be substantially limited. And the child with dyslexia is provided the use of writing templates and additional time for assignments and tests even though that child no longer requires ‘special education or related services’.

In short, once a “*child with a disability*” no longer needs special education and related services, the learning expectations for that child are not reduced and that child is still entitled under Section 504, to those supports, tools and procedures that provide that child equal access to instruction and assessment and without which the child may not be able to access grade-level instruction and participate fully on assessments.

**Differences in Determining Eligibility & ‘Plan’ Development:** In New York, under IDEA, the Committee on Special Education (CSE) [or Committee on Preschool Special Education (CPSE)] determines if a child is eligible to receive special education and related services. And it is the CSE that creates the child’s Individualized Education Plan, which includes not only what specially designed instruction and related services the child is to receive, but also what other accommodations will be made in order to ensure that the child has equal access to all of the services, programs, or activities of

**Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) vs. Section 504—What’s the Difference? *Cont’d***

the School District, thereby intending to protect the child’s rights under Section 504/Title II of the ADAAA. Importantly, parents are required members of the CSE and have an equal role to play with every other member of the Committee in determining eligibility and in developing the IEP.

If a child is no longer eligible for, or has been found ineligible for, special education and related services, however, IDEA does not apply and there is no CSE to create a plan to accommodate for the child’s disability. Instead, each school district’s Board of Education is responsible for creating its own policy for ensuring that Section 504/Title II of ADAAA rights are protected. The Mamaroneck School District’s [policy, #4322](#), can be found on the District’s website. The policy designates Student Support Services as the District’s Section 504 Compliance Office, and provides for the implementation of procedures addressing the identification, evaluation and re-evaluation of eligible students, the provision of reasonable accommodations and transportation necessary to afford each student a free appropriate public education, and the provision of an equal opportunity to participate in non-academic and extra-curricular services.

The policy also describes the establishment of a Section 504 team to consider a child’s eligibility for Section 504 protection and, if warranted, recommend how the child will be provided a free appropriate public education. Unlike under IDEA, however, there is no requirement under Section 504/Title II of the ADAAA (nor in the District’s policy) that the child’s parents be a member of the team, only that the team be “comprised of a group of persons knowledgeable about the child and person(s) familiar with the meaning of the evaluative data and program access options.”

Also unlike under IDEA, Section 504/Title II of the ADAAA does not require that a student’s ‘504 Plan’ be written down or otherwise provided to the student’s parents. The District policy specifies that there be procedures implemented to ensure the dissemination of the contents of each student’s 504 accommodation plan to the District staff charged with implementing the plan, and that parents have the right to inspect relevant school records. And also unlike under IDEA, there is no requirement that a student’s “504 plan” be reviewed each year; the District policy is to re-evaluate eligible students at least once every three years.

Nothing in this article is meant to suggest that any of our children are in any way being denied a free appropriate public education. It is fair to say that in most families, what is appropriate for our children is appropriate for most other children, and the information in this article may never be needed. In those situations, however, when that may not be true, when circumstances are different, either for a short period of time (until the cast on the broken arm is removed, for example), or longer, it is hoped that this article will be of value to parents as their children’s first and best teachers and advocates.

**Additional Resources:**

To learn more about Section 504, [click here](#).

Wright’s Law article—[IDEA and Section 504 Basic Differences and Similarities](#)  
[SEPTA’s website](#) also contains a number of useful resources.

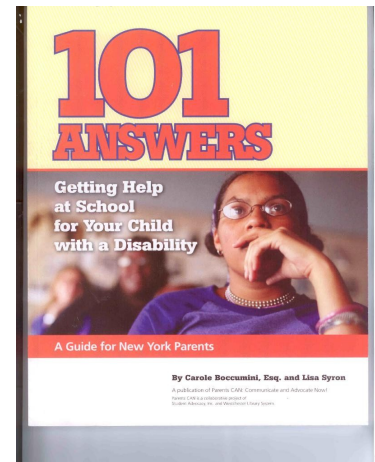
**Note:** This article is not legal advice and is not intended as such; the views expressed are the author’s, not SEPTA’s nor the District’s.

## Resources to be Aware of!

### A Wonderful Free Resource for Parents

#### **101 Answers - Getting Help for Your Child With a Disability - A Guide for New York Parents**

This is a handy, very easy to understand guide for parents who have a child (age birth through high school) who may have a disability. The guide provides straightforward answers to 101 questions you might have about how to get help for your child. You'll learn about what is possible under the Individuals With Disabilities Act (IDEA) which relates to special education as well as under Section 504. Very importantly, it is customized for New York, which has some additional provisions. In addition to explaining the process in "plain English", as well as much of the often confusing terminology, the guide gives straightforward advice about how to advocate for your child. Copies of the Guide, published by [Student Advocacy](#) are available in English and in Spanish from the local public library or you can download them - [Click here for the English version](#) and [click here for the Spanish version](#) and see [Informese sobre Student Advocacy](#).



In addition, a detailed New York PTA & NYSUT developed Guide to Special Education is also available, [click here](#).

## SEPTA—Remaining Programs & Events for 2011:

**Monday, April 4 at 7:30p.m. Hommocks Middle School Auditorium— Protecting Children (and their Parents) from Environmental Toxins. Speaker: Dr. Maida P. Galvez** -The Children's Health Center, Mount Sinai Medical School. BPA & Phthalates: They're in your plastic containers and baby bottles; in your cosmetics and the linings of your canned goods. Europe, California, and Suffolk County have banned these chemicals. What do they know that we don't? There are simple things you can do to protect your family. Dr. Galvez can tell you how!

**Thursday, April 14th at 9:00a.m. "SEPTA Talks"**: Please join us for another informal chat about concerns and ideas that you may have regarding your child! Seasoned SEPTA members will be there to share experiences and provide some ideas for all parents—General and Special Education. We hope to see you at the **Nautilus Diner** on Thursday, April 14th at 9:00 am. Coffee and treats are on us. Bring a friend! For more information, contact Suzanne Prigoda ([thefun4@aol.com](mailto:thefun4@aol.com)) or Amy Lieberman ([dashdoar@gmail.com](mailto:dashdoar@gmail.com))

**Thursday, April 28 at 7:30p.m. MHS Library Dr. Ann Engelland presents ""Raising Resilient Children in an Age of Earthquakes, Recession and Social Media"**. Preceding the program there will be a school district budget discussion and vote by SEPTA, HMX PTA and MHS PTSA.

**Wednesday, May 11th at 7:30p.m. - Charley Moskowitz- Support for Siblings of Children with Special Needs** 7:30p.m. HMX Library (SEPTA Program). If you have questions, about the program on May 11th, please contact: Patty Wolff – Email: [wolff@optonline.net](mailto:wolff@optonline.net), Tel: 698-8882 or Linda Banta Email: [lbanta@optonline.net](mailto:lbanta@optonline.net) Tel: 834-7488