

Parent Connect...

Continuing to Improve Student Support Services...

Dear Parents,

The mid-year point of this school year has quickly come upon us, and I want to share with you how our staff continues to improve programs and services for children with special needs. This year several district department initiatives are focusing on areas listed below:

- Social Skills
- Data Driven/Measurable IEP Goals/Objectives
- School-based Assistive Technology Teams
- New Special Education Assessments
- Behavioral Therapy Skills Training
- Expanding Community Work Experiences and Job Training Opportunities
- Co-Teaching - Secondary Level

The Newsletter provides information on each of these improvement initiatives. Through these professional development learning opportunities for staff, we continue to examine how we provide various forms of instruction to engage students in their learning, while evaluating student performance.

Student Support Services staff has also provided several workshops for parents this year, including "What is a 504 Accommodation Plan?"; "Social Skills"; "Staying Connected with your Child" (Elementary); "Staying Connected with your Teen" (Secondary), and "Assistive Technology". Staff will continue to help you learn about strategies, techniques, and services that will assist in supporting your child's development.

As we continue to improve, we will seek information from you. Included in this edition is a survey the staff would like you to complete following your participation at your child's Annual Review CSE meeting this year. Please follow the directions to complete the survey. This data will help us to continue to reflect on our practice, and to strengthen the planning process for your child. Please go to the SEPTA website at <http://mamkschoolspta.org/septa/> and complete the survey following your child's CSE meeting.

Our improvement plans include strengthening the integration of children with special needs into the school community. We want to help others better understand the needs of children with learning differences. The PTA's in collaboration with SEPTA are sponsoring a district program. The presenter is Spencer West who is inspirational and charismatic when speaking candidly about struggles he overcame after losing his legs at the age of five. He speaks about overcoming stereotyping and bullying, about finding meaning and happiness in a material world and how he never lost hope or courage needed to mount personal obstacles, more information about Spencer at <http://www.metowe.com/speakers/spencer-west>. Save the date: March 13, 7:00 pm Hommocks.

Spencer's presentation is part of the district Building Bridges initiative in each school, to help all students better understand individuals with learning differences. This initiative helps all of us continue to improve our understanding of differences.

If you want to learn more about Student Support Services, please join us at the February 7, 7:30 pm, BOE meeting at MHS, Library Classroom. At this time, Roni Kramer, Director of Elementary Special Education, Karen Gatto, Director of Secondary Special Education and I will share with the BOE various components of district special education programs and related services.

Please contact your child's teacher if you have questions regarding your child's IEP. If Roni, Karen or I can be of assistance, please contact us. Enjoy the readings!

Dr. Anthony T. Minotti
Assistant Superintendent

Student Support Services, Personnel and Administration

Elementary Special Education Happenings

This has been a busy start to the school year. Special Education teachers and providers have continued to blur the lines between general and special education. Many Special Education teachers are using their skills to help unidentified students. All teachers have implemented the district goal for collecting data and are closely monitoring the progress of all their students.

The Special Education teachers and providers have also been participating with their general education counterparts in the district initiatives and professional development. They are working on RTI with the Aussie consultants or Allyson Daley, Elementary Reading Coach. Some teachers worked over the summer with Mariana Ivanov, Elementary Math Coach, and created tiered math lesson which are now on the website and available to all the teachers.

Our special classes for children on the Autism Spectrum are piloting a new curriculum. It is developmentally aligned with skills in all domains. The teachers can take data and change the students' programs for individualized instruction as needed.

Our psychologists and behavior specialist are working together and creating behavior plans for student at varying levels of intervention.

Lastly, both psychologists and special education teachers are learning and using the new diagnostic assessment instruments that were purchased last year. This is helping them determine appropriate interventions and will contribute to writing measurable goals.



Submitted by:

Roni Kramer, Director of Elementary Special Education

Presentations for Parents:

- February 6—Education Especial, (for parents who only speak Spanish) - 7:30 pm; Hommocks Library
- February 7—”Technology to Support Language and Communication at School”, 9:00 am, N101, MHS
- March 27 – “Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: — Location TBD
- April 18 – Elementary Parent Networking Meeting—7:30 pm, Location TBD
- April 23—District Budget Discussion and Vote—7:30 pm, MHS Library

Secondary Special Education Happenings....

I can hardly believe that we are mid way through this year already! It seems like only yesterday that we were gearing up for the start of the year. We have already begun to plan for the **Annual Review** season. Our CSE parent meeting was well attended. Roni and I reviewed the new IEP format and some important guidelines as we prepare for the Annual Review season.

POINTS for PARENTS to CONSIDER for ANNUAL REVIEW:

Let your child's teacher know if there are times you are **NOT** available for a CSE. Cancelled CSEs are extremely difficult to re-schedule, given the number of meetings we have to hold. We try to schedule meetings that are convenient for all.

Communicate with your child's team regarding any priority concerns you may have regarding your child's goals. It is always good to have this conversation prior to walking into the CSE mtg.

Celebrate success! The goal is always to reduce the amount of Special Education supports and services a student requires as he/she progresses particularly on the secondary level. We want to prepare our students to be as independent as possible as they plan for post high school experiences.

Ask questions when you are confused or need clarification. The CSE process is confusing and complicated. There is no such thing as a "silly question".

Encourage your high school child to attend his/her own meeting. The student voice is important in the creation of the plan. Self advocacy is something we encourage as we prepare students for post secondary planning.

TRANSITION PLANNING

As per Special Education law, all IEPs for students turning age 15 include a transition plan. In Mamaroneck, we include the first Transition Plan in the 9th grade IEP.

Transition Plans include students' post-secondary goals related to:
Training/Education
Employment

Each year, students' transition plans are evaluated and discussed at CSE meetings to develop realistic goals and create coordinated activities to assist the student in gaining the skills necessary to achieve their goals.

It is through these specific, measurable post-secondary goals and transition related activities that school staff and families can measure each child's individualized success.

Kristen Macaluso has been working with the 8th grade and high school Special Education teachers to strengthen their skills in adding the Transition Plan to the IEP. She has provided teachers with various tools such as career assessments and a values inventory to help them gather specific information about their students' interests and goals. Parental input is also very beneficial.

Mamaroneck SD participates in a Longitudinal Study for Transition Planning (NLTS 2012)

Our district has been selected by the federal government to participate in the NLTS. The outcome for many classified students as they have left the high school setting has been disappointing for many. Classified students often spend their post secondary years in remedial classes that lead to nothing and the unemployment rate is high. The intention of the study is to collect information from a number of public schools about the experiences of students and their outcomes which will in turn lead to ongoing improvement of programs and policies. Below are some major points of the study:

The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS 2012)

550 participating districts nationwide over a 2 year period

Post secondary results of a sample of general education students to compare with a sample of students with disabilities

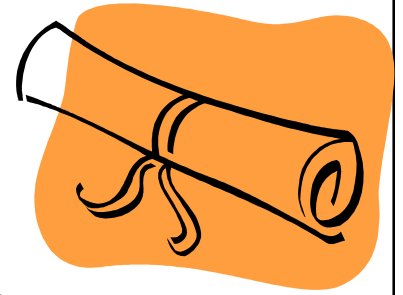
Data will be collected through interview process by NLTS 2012

Results will be analyzed and shared with districts and used by us to measure our effectiveness in Transition Planning

DIPLOMA OPTIONS

I recently attended a meeting set up by the Lower Hudson Association of Pupil Personnel Administrators (LHAPPA) that included the Special Education Parent Teachers Association (SEPTA) leadership. Two of our Mamaroneck parents joined me. At the meeting, we met with Dr. Rebecca Cort, Deputy Commissioner of the NY State Education's Dept. of Educational Services and a Regents member. The focus of the meeting was to discuss our concerns about requiring all students to pass Regents exams in order to graduate (until this year, students were able to take RCTs exams if they failed Regents exams). The result has been the creation of a Task Force to examine alternative pathways for graduation for some of our students with disabilities. There is a sense of urgency attached to this important work as no one wants to see students not graduate because they cannot pass a state exam.

Thank you to our parents who continue to be focused on this issue and who gave of their time to attend the recent meeting!



SECONDARY SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND SUPPORTS

As in years past, we are looking ahead to next year to plan for Special Education support. We are planning to increase our co teaching efforts in both the high school and the middle school. Additionally, we have continued to work with our related service providers to embed their services into our specialized, self contained classes in order to provide a richer experience. Our Therapeutic and Academic Support Class (TASC), will be moving up to the high school level.

We are excited about the prospect of these additions to our continuum and will continue to describe our efforts in the future.

MORE ON TRANSITION ACTIVITIES.....

Did you know that we offer vocational experiences to almost 40 High School students???

STEP, 12:1:2 Special class:

4 - students in community-based work experiences: Sarah Neuman Nursing Home, Plates Restaurant

4 - students working within the school: English Dept. Book Room, MHS Library, MHS Café

All students take part in Garden Project with Larchmont Chamber of Commerce

Transition Academy, 15:1:1 Special class:

4 - students in community-based and in-school work experiences: Equinox Gym, Larchmont Library, Foley's Hardware, Plates Restaurant, Boiano Bakery

3 - students working within the school: MHS Library; Special Ed. Dept.; Music Dept; Science Dept.

All students take part in a community activity (travel training, budgeting, etc.) one time per week

STRIVE, 15:1 Special class: Independent Study and/or Internship:

5 - seniors taking part in internships and/or a career/college exploration independent study

After-school "Building Bridges" Athletic Internship:

3 - students being paid a stipend to assist the Girls' Soccer Team and Wrestling Team with bookkeeping and managing equipment

BOCES:

17 - students attending BOCES Occupational Education Program.

Total of 38 students taking part in some kind of work related experience

We are pleased with our efforts and the ability to offer more students more vocational experiences. We are always looking for additional settings that will help us match students to their vocational strengths. If you have any paid or unpaid vocational leads, please contact Kristen Macaluso at Ext. 3039.



WELCOME FRANK LOCURTO!!!

Along with new program additions and expansion, we have added a K-12 Behavior Specialist to our staff roster. On the secondary level, Frank has provided us with valuable insight and expertise in developing behavior support plans and we are grateful for the contribution he has made in such a short time.

Submitted by:

Karen Gatto, Director of Secondary Special Education

Psychology and Social Work Departments' Collaborate....



Across the district, the **psychology and social work departments** have embraced the initiative of universal design to address positive affective development as well as cognitive development in children and adolescents. In each school, **psychologists and social workers** have been supporting programs that create school environments that are calmer and safer and where students learn better because the school culture supports the social and emotional development of students. The **mental health departments** have collaborated with **speech therapists, guidance counselors, administrators and staff** to support programs that promote and enhance individual strengths and increase opportunities for the development of positive social behaviors for students and their families.

Collaborative initiatives:

The **psychology and social work departments** held their first joint department meeting to discuss mental health needs across the district. The most salient issues identified were: managing student stress/anxiety, high risk behaviors on the secondary school levels, emotion regulation needs, school avoidance/absenteeism and substance abuse. The departments also shared programs that provide positive behavior supports to all students. Case conferencing regarding individual students provided an opportunity for peer supervision.

The **departments** discussed **parent outreach** through workshops scheduled for the fall (psychology department) and spring (social work department). In October, the psychologists presented workshops at both the elementary and secondary levels on "Managing Anxiety: Practical Tips for Parents."

The **Psychologists and Social Workers** also met with the staff at the **Community Counseling Center** to discuss current student and family needs.

This year, the **social work, psychology and speech/language departments** have met several times to integrate the Response to Intervention (RTI) Social Skills Guide & Positive Behavior Support & Intervention draft. The departments are working to create district-wide goals to address social linguistic skills. The RTI Social Skills/ Positive Behavior support guide was introduced at a Hommocks staff meeting, along with a presentation by **district psychologists** on managing Classroom Behavior and was very well received by the Hommocks **teaching staff**.

In many schools, **psychologists and social workers** are pleased to be co-facilitating social skills and counseling groups with their colleagues including **speech and language therapists and guidance counselors**.

As part of our social skills initiative at Mamaroneck High School, the "Lounge" will be open three days a week during lunch and facilitated by the **Social Work and Psychology departments**. The goal is to provide a place where our more isolated students have a safe and inviting place to hang out with other students during lunch.

The departments are consulting with **Dr. Alec Miller, Director of the Cognitive Co-Founder of Cognitive and Behavioral Consultants of Westchester, LLP** to develop a DBT program to be piloted at the high school for at risk students. This fall, skills training workshops were held for **psychologists and social workers**. DBT is a cognitive-behavioral treatment approach that emphasizes the development of four skill sets: mindfulness, interpersonal effectiveness, emotion regulation and distress tolerance. DBT is an empirically supported technique, meaning that it has been clinically tested for its effectiveness with adolescents and adults. DBT within a school setting is unique in that it provides an opportunity for multi-problem adolescents to receive treatment within their daily routine.

Throughout the school year, *MHS Jump Start Afterschool* has been providing a group of 20^{9th} grade students with a continuation of learning opportunities for the participants of the Jump Start program which was held this past summer. There is extensive research which demonstrates that participation in after-school programs is positively associated with improved social, emotional and academic outcomes. The program is funded by the **District and Mamaroneck Schools Foundation Grant**. It is staffed by a **social worker, guidance counselor, AIS teacher and teaching staff from Math, Science, English and Social Studies**.

Hispanic Resource Center (HRC) and the **Social Work department at MHS** collaborated on a program called *We Count*. This grant funded a civics education program for local youth who met for 8 weeks and created public service announcements on issues important to them. They are currently being edited and a screening date will be announced. Preliminary feedback from our students was great and they are now connected to another resource in our community. The second group just began and runs through March.

The **Padres Unidos** program and the **social work department** continue to provide important information and resources for the Latino community. This year, the program continues to collaborate with the **PT Council, the IT department, RADAR and APPLE**. Some of the topics include educating our parents on the use of district websites and parent portal, environmental awareness, drug and alcohol prevention and pathways to college.

MHS Social Work department, in collaboration with the **MHS Financial Aid Office and Counseling Department**, presented *MHS Financial AID Part II* - a hands-on workshop for Latino families on filing their FAFSA on January 25th.

Submitted by:

Joan Chess, Coordinator; School Psychologists; Meryl Schaffer, Coordinator; School Social Workers

Social Skills District Initiative . . .

This year a psychologist and language/speech therapist have been assigned to serve as facilitators for social skills in the district, with a focus this year on improving the experiences for all students in our four elementary schools. Staff Development for Aides has been provided and is on-going. There was a half-day kick-off program held on September 1st for all aides and security personnel. This has been followed by building level meetings to address their changing roles during lunch and recess (e.g. direct sensitivity training activities, a heightened awareness of typical developmental stages as well as interest levels, why their close proximity to locations and direct involvement in activities is important, how to coach students when they disagree, etc.). Our work with aides has been at the forefront of the initiative.

In addition, on-going direct observations during the more unstructured times in the school day and conversations with building teams that include administrators, psychologists, and language/speech therapists have helped to target major areas of concern and recommendations for improvement. These might include logistics for classes entering and exiting lunchrooms, supplemental seat activities available during lunch to reduce noise levels while some students continue eating and others wait for dismissal, suggestions for the purchase of additional materials/equipment, structural improvements and arrangement of activities during recess, etc. In some cases, problem solving around specific student difficulties have been a focus as well.

Representatives from the Language/Speech department, Psychologists, and Social Workers have met several times to integrate the RTI Social Skills Guide & Positive Behavior Support & Intervention draft for staff. We are expecting a completion of this guide in the months ahead.

A District-Wide Social Skills Parent Guide has been developed...

A District-Wide Social Skills Parent Guide has been developed and was circulated via SEPTA following an evening presentation to that organization on October 18th. An electronic copy of this guide is available on the district website. Hard copies are being distributed at the Personnel Office. This is a guide for all parents and we encourage you to read it at your earliest convenience. In addition to the parent guide, we are developing a Social Skills website that we hope will become a useful and user-friendly location for related articles, images, and overviews of some lunch and recess programs. These additional resources will be online shortly.

In an effort to increase positive outcomes regarding the social-linguistic needs of classified students in the district, we are working on developing a list of concerns that are evident in school settings. This will serve as a framework for how to generate goals that provide the interventions necessary improve functioning in this area. We are working in collaboration with our district Behavior Specialist as well as the representatives from the other departments mentioned above, to be sure that any goals we create are measurable and achievable.

Submitted by: Leslie Goldschmid, Language Therapist; Alison Campbell, School Psychologist

Language Therapist's Initiatives

This year we have been providing services for many students in our self-contained classes by pushing into the room and working in authentic settings. We are exploring the benefits of this model and whether or not its expansion would meet the needs of some of our RTI students as well. Clearly some students continue to qualify for direct intervention due to the nature of their communication issues and it is our expectation that this piece of our service delivery model will not be abandoned.

We have been applying the skills we learned last year in our PROMPT Bridging course when a student's needs require such an approach. Students who present with hearing and auditory processing issues continue to be assessed when an assistive listening device is recommended. We are formalizing the pre-trial and post-trial process for this technology so that the need for this equipment in a classroom has been documented.

Therapists in the district have been exploring how our expertise in communication and literacy can be made more readily available to students and professionals in our schools. Conferring with kindergarten teachers around the Phonological Assessment (PA) and PA instruction, as well as collaborating with teachers regarding the building blocks to comprehension skills is an on-going task.

Pragmatic functioning and its impact on social interactions is a key area of exploration and services. We are making every effort to align ourselves with the many initiatives outlined in the Social Skills section above. Some therapists have also participated in the building teams for expanding this initiative in their respective buildings.

Submitted by: Leslie Goldschmid, Language Therapist, Coordinator

Happenings in the Guidance Department

“One rarely becomes a “significant other” on the basis of actions when formally instructing. It is in relationships developed in wayside teaching that one is most likely to influence the lives of others.” John Lounsbury

John Lounsbury, editor of the Middle School Journal, wrote those words in 1987. They apply today to educators working at any grade level. What he meant by “wayside teaching” is the teaching that is done between classes, when walking in the halls, after school, and in dozens of one-to-one encounters, however brief. The essence of successful teaching is “rooted in building relationships” and “getting in touch with the student’s heart as well as his or her mind.”

As an integral part of students support services, our counseling staff has the opportunity each day for meaningful “wayside teaching.” Our work this year has focused on building the kind of relationship Mr. Lounsbury believes to be so crucial in the lives of students.

A very important initiative began in August when we welcomed 35 incoming 9th graders designated as “at risk students, to our “Jump Start” program. With assistance of two teachers, Zoe Ruiz, school social worker, began an important connection with this group through a 2 week program designed specifically to ease the transition to the high school. The selected students have been closely monitored by a dedicated group of support staff who meet with them on a weekly basis.

Our work with the entire incoming class began on the first day of orientation. Counselors are responsible for approximately 45 students in every grade level. Our priority this fall has been to get to know each one of our new students and their story and begin to establish our role in their lives over the next four years. We have done that through group meetings, an evening program for parents as well as individual meetings with parents and 9th graders. Most important has been “one to one encounters” whether in our offices or in the halls between classes.

Those encounters with 10th graders, who seem to return to school much more at ease and confident are just as important to us as we monitor their progress. After the February break counselors will meet with each 10th grade student individually to plan and do course selection for the all important junior year.

In December, our work with post high school planning and the college selection process began with an evening meeting in a packed McLain Auditorium for all juniors. Earlier, in October, an evening program and panel discussion for parents of students with disabilities was held – a joint program sponsored by SEPTA and the counseling department. Currently counselors are now meeting individually with juniors and their parents to partner with them and help with every facet of the college admissions process.

The relationships we build with our students peaks with seniors as they plan the next step in their lives. It is a time they seem to need us the most. This past fall was no exception and comes with the usual anxiety and pressure for seniors, their parents and counselors. To date, 290 seniors have submitted applications to 332 colleges. More than ever before seniors are applying sooner rather than later under the ED or EA plan. A total of 105 applied ED with 60 already accepted to 38 different colleges. An additional 97 applied EA to date 72 have been accepted to at least one EA school while others will hear in the coming weeks. Meanwhile, we are very fortunate to have the expertise and thoughtful assistance of Kristen Macaluso to help with the transition for those who may not be heading to a traditional college setting.

For counselors, there is an ebb and flow to the school year; each season with its unique demands and priorities as well as opportunities for interaction with students and parents. No matter what time of year, it is our intention to take full advantage of every opportunity for “wayside teaching,” to build relationships that start the first day of 9th grade and nurtured through graduation and perhaps, beyond.

Submitted by:

Bob Sweeney, Counseling Coordinator



Mamaroneck Schools Assistive Technology Happenings

Assistive Technology (AT) in the Mamaroneck schools is continuing to build the capacity in the district to provide AT to students and AT support to teachers.

A key goal this year is to establish AT teams in each of the schools. Last year we conducted an AT team pilot in one of the elementary schools, with the collaboration of the Westchester Institute of Human Development's *SWAT* (Schools in Westchester Assistive Technology Teams) program. The results of the pilot were encouraging and we are now expanding this effort to the other schools. This year, with the help of the *SWAT* program, we have established AT teams at each of the four elementary schools, with a total of over 30 teachers who have made AT a part of their professional work. This is a powerful means of providing more efficient and timely AT support, and of building professional expertise among colleagues. For the second half of the year, we will be establishing AT teams at the middle and high schools.

Our second school-based effort this year is to develop AT toolkits. AT toolkits are a collection of devices and resources that can help students who need alternative tools for learning. They also include a guide that teachers and administrators can use to match these devices and resources to a student's needs. These toolkits, along with the AT teams, are key tools in increasing the capacity of each school to provide easy and timely access to these tools as student needs arise. Look for the first of these toolkits to arrive in the schools this spring.

The Mamaroneck Assistive Technology Web site launched last year and continues to grow as a resource for the district. You'll find resources for teachers, staff, and parents, including updates on AT efforts in the district, online resources on a variety of AT-related topics, and support materials for key technology tools. There is a link where you can request a home copy of the SOLO Literacy Suite, a link that is getting more and more traffic as we build awareness and support for the use of this suite of reading/writing tools. Finally, we encourage you to follow Mamaroneck AT news on our Twitter and Facebook feeds. Visit the site from the link on the Student Support Services site or go directly to www.mamkschools.org/at. While you are there, send the AT team a note with your comments!

Finally, we are always keeping an eye on emerging technologies, and one area we've been eagerly exploring is the world of iPads, iPod Touches, and apps. These devices offer exciting possibilities in the areas of augmentative communication, reading and writing, and ubiquitous computing, to name just a few. Tapping the interest in the district, we recently held our first-ever faculty "*Appy Hour*" in order to share our knowledge of powerful educational apps. We've compiled these apps into a list of recommended apps and have posted the list on our Web site—check it out!



Submitted by:

Andrew Hess, Assistive Technology Specialist
Ann Rushe, Evaluator/Language Therapist