

SPECIAL EDITION

Mamaroneck 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.

April 2008

Special Education Parent Teacher Association

Volume 2, Issue 2

Dear Readers:

Oftentimes I wonder why someone has not taken advantage of an opportunity to effect change. I have been told the answer is twofold:

1. lack of passion- defined as a driving conviction.
2. too daunting a task to think that you and /or your actions can make a difference

I recently read Bill Clinton's *Giving- How each of us can change the world*. An easy, and surprisingly effective, way to give is simply by communicating – imparting your skill or knowledge. Knowledge is empowering, and by sharing your knowledge you can empower others. Something else I believe strongly is the value of giving locally. Think about children and their families in our community who benefit from the tireless efforts of every volunteer (coaches, PTA, food pantry ...).

I can think of a recent example, not quite so local, where the collective power of individual, small actions made a big difference. Many of you are aware of what transpired in December of 2007 when NYU Child Study Center launched a provocative public awareness campaign entitled "Ransom Notes", highlighting ADHD, Asperger's syndrome, autism, bulimia, depression and obsessive compulsive disorder. The campaign's goal was to act as a wake up call and spark dialogue. However, the ad campaign had hardly gotten off the ground when emails swirled around in outrage at the depiction of these disorders as holding their subjects hostage, BUT what brought the campaign to an immediate halt was the massive number of individual emails and letters directed to Dr. Harold S Koplewicz, founder and director of the Child Study Center.

We can effect change step by step- every individual BAR NONE!

This year in SEPTA we have had a huge opportunity to effect change. In the beginning of the school year one of the goals outlined by SEPTA was to attain measurable change. As a Board, with the help of Dr. Minotti, Gail Boyle and Roni Kramer and the entire district staff we have seized those opportunities and have made tremendous strides and have accomplished our goal. Most changes have been in the making for a while. They may not seem big but these changes have had a positive effect on some of our kids, and are therefore monumental. For example: common terminology across the 6 schools, foreign language alternatives for kids whose learning difficulties make foreign language learning difficult, disseminating information, and establishing of protocol for transition planning.

The buzzword during this season of 2008 is change.

My request for you – let something inspire you then, seize opportunities, communicate. START A DIALOGUE. There are many, many individuals in decision making positions that can help change the status quo.

Again with passion and with incremental steps, over time we must more than believe, we must know, we can all make a difference. (*Please see fun fact on page 3)

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Whatever your passion, take a step and give- Did you know one of the many meanings of the verb, to give, is “to impart or communicate”? Give by putting an idea into action, by imparting your view to those that can effect change.

Giving can make a profoundly positive difference. Quoting *Spirit* a magazine published by Special Olympics “*We all have gifts to contribute no matter what our ability level*”.

On a lighter note, I'd like to express my heartfelt gratitude to ALL of you for giving me the opportunity to serve as SEPTA president by supporting me.

In my opinion what is necessary is... passion, combined with action!

I believe together we have made a difference this year.

Amy Lieberman,

SEPTA President

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FROM THE ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT FOR STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

What “We” Have Started to Accomplish.....? Where Are “We” Going?

This has been a productive and gratifying school year of learning and the connection of resources throughout the Department of Student Support Services, that is attributed to a very dedicated and caring staff, and an extremely involved SEPTA organization. The Department's Major Areas of Focus were shared with staff and parents in October, 2007, along with the recent Special Education Program Review. These two documents will continue to be our guides for the identification of areas for continuous improvement.

Major “First Step” initiatives that the general education, special education, and related services staff worked on this year included:

- New Research-based Speech/Language Support System
- K-12 Continuum of Services Model Developed/Published
- Kindergarten Fine Motor Centers with Kindergarten Teachers and OT's
- K-5 Alignment for Elementary Hand Writing Curriculum
- Middle/High School Counseling Alignment (Social Workers, Guidance Counselors, Psychologists)
- New Health Services Procedures/Policies
- New High School Spanish Conversation Course
- New Section 504 Policy
- New website for Special Education teachers to share teaching strategies
- Assistive Technology Coordination
- Transition Services Grant Implementation
- Staff and Parent Connection Newsletters

- Established Partnership with the Curriculum Dept.
- Pre-K-12 Alignment of Services for Hispanic Students and Parents, by Social Workers
- Continued Elementary Co-Teaching Training for General and Special Staff
- Reorganization of the Office for Student Support Services
- Recipient of Two Foundation Grants (Fine Motor Centers; Training for School Aides)
- Staff Development for School Aides on each Superintendent's Day
- Created District Programs to Transition Students from Out of District Private Schools
- Implemented a new Non-Public School Special Education Support System to comply with new mandates, “District of Location”
- Collaboration with the Curriculum Department to begin the development of the new K-12 Response To Intervention (RTI) structure
- Coordinated system by School Psychologists for the development of Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBA's) and Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIP's).

Next Steps for the 2008-2009 School Year:

- Sustain all initiatives above.... *and*
- Continue to strengthen in district Special Education programs/services
- Continue to integrate “push-in” Student Support Services into grades K-3 to support “all” students
- Create a K-12 Response To Intervention (RTI) structure with general education
- Broaden the network for “Circle of Friends” for children with special needs.

Submitted by: Dr. Anthony Minotti, Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services

NEXT STEPS

Mamaroneck UFSD Special Education Program Review

The recent Special Education Program Review needs to be thoroughly assessed and areas of focus prioritized for staff to continue to improve programs and services for students with disabilities. We will form a Special Education Program Review Focus Group that will include school staff and parents, to thoroughly review the report and recommend a proposed comprehensive plan to move the appropriate recommendations forward in a structure of short- and long-range measurable goals and objectives.

The Focus Group will meet for two days in June to begin a process of “collective inquiry”. Through conversations, we will identify major themes to be addressed and develop structures and systems that can be enhanced through the reallocation of present programs/services and the identification of needed resources. During the summer a sub-committee of the Focus Group will meet to create a draft report for the entire Focus Group to review in September, 2008.

The Focus Group report will be shared with the Board of Education at a Study Session early in the 2008-2009 school year. The SEPTA Executive Board will select four to six parents (pre-k; elementary; middle; high school) to serve on the Focus Group. Please notify Amy Lieberman at dashdoar@aol.com if you are interested in being a part of this planning process for the future of Special Education in Mamaroneck.

Fun Fact: ONE DIME AT A TIME

Did you know that the fight against infantile paralysis, or polio, was commonly associated with the annual fundraising parties held in January beginning in 1934 to honor President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s birthday? In 1937, Eddie Cantor organized a fundraising strategy: the first March of Dimes appeal on national radio. Cantor asked everyone to just send dimes to the White House. Within one month a total of 2,680,000 dimes flooded into the White House, demonstrating the enormous value of small contributions made by many people.

MOTIVATION THROUGH A MATH GAME

By: Nick LaRosa, Hommocks

Some students seem naturally enthusiastic about learning, but some may need their instructors to inspire, challenge, and stimulate them. Unfortunately, there is no single magical formula for motivating students. I found that creating an environment where students are working together and having fun while working is a great motivator. We play a game in math class that incorporates students working together and having fun. The rules to the game are as follows:

The teacher draws a dartboard with math problems on the dry erase board.
Students are given three magnets with which they have to hit then answer a math problem
Students are given two forms of assistance which they can only use once:

- Ask a student for assistance.
- Ask the teacher for a clue.

The student with the most points at the end of the game wins.

I have found that teaming up a higher level math student with a lower level math student is the most effective way to create relationships within the classroom since the students are working together to achieve a common goal. This cooperative learning creates an environment in which each student feels a sense of belonging. This game is an effective and motivational way to reinforce the math concepts that we learn in class.

CONNECTING TEACHERS AND BEST PRACTICES

Annie Ward, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction

In addition to making frequent, informal visits to each school, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Annie Ward schedules extended blocks of time each month to visit classrooms with building administrators. The purpose of these "learning walks" is to shine the spotlight on teaching and learning in the following ways:

- To familiarize administrators with the district landscape and the unique rhythms of each school; to ground administrators' work in daily classroom practice;
- To see what students experience;
- To recognize stellar practices and select teacher leaders;
- To inform professional "matchmaking"—opportunities for teachers with similar interests or needs to visit each other and establish networks;
- To apply broad concepts from education research to district classrooms; and
- To note interesting patterns and trends; to provide frequent feedback to teachers and administrators about professional practice.

Annie communicates a specific focus for her learning walks and shares related professional readings with those who wish to join in the inquiry. During each learning walk, Annie and the administrators visit as many classrooms as possible, sometimes conferring with students and teachers, jotting notes, and collecting samples of student work and/or taking photographs. At the end of the month, Annie compiles these "snapshots" into a portrait of teaching and learning in the district—a letter or multimedia presentation filled with examples of "best practice" from district classrooms.

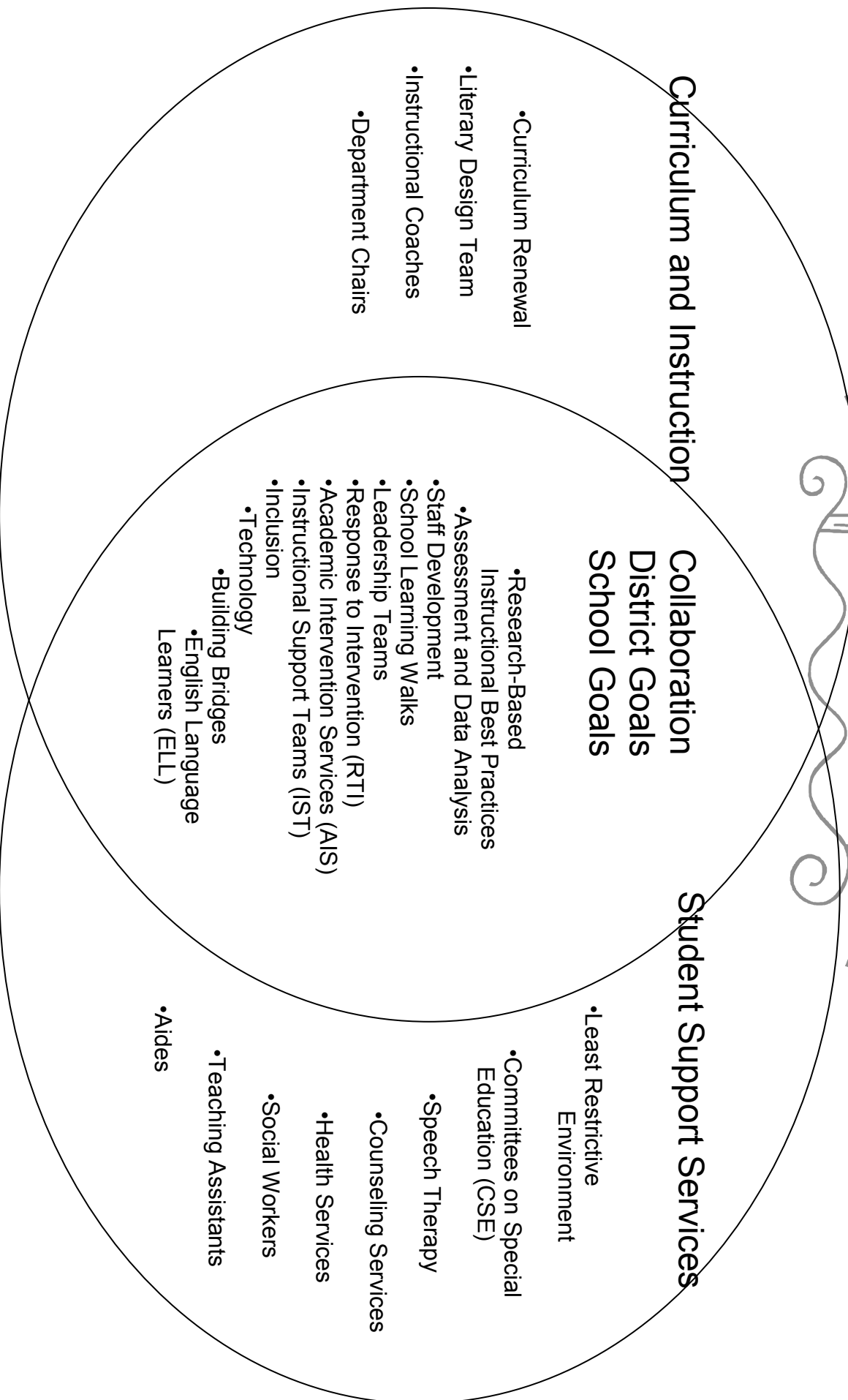
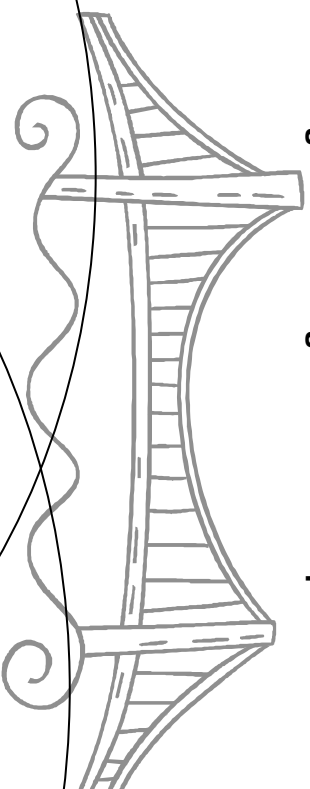
Each month's focus questions and reports are archived on an internal web site for district faculty members to access. This year's topics have included the following:

- Investing in Learning: Classroom Environments, Rituals and Routines, and Building Community****
- Assessing Students' Learning Needs, Progress, and Achievement
- Long-Term Planning and Unit Design
- Lesson Design and Instructional Decision-Making
- Technology-Enhanced Learning Environments
- Research-Based Instructional Best Practices
- Effective Note-taking Strategies

"The monthly reports, though time-consuming to create, are an efficient way for teachers to make virtual "visits" to each other's classrooms," Annie says. "It's an irony of teaching to be surrounded by kids all day and yet isolated from colleagues. I have the pleasure of visiting all schools, grade levels, and departments. The learning walk reports are my way to share the view and celebrate the thoughtful practice that occurs every day in district classrooms."

**** This particular learning walk can be accessed through our SEPTA webpage specifically in our online version of this newsletter.

The Bridge Connecting General and Special Education



SPECIAL CLASS READING GRADES 9-12

The Special Education department at MHS offers a Reading Skills class to help students with serious disabilities in basic literacy skills. The class is instructed through The Wilson Reading System which uses a multisensory approach, and is based on the Orton-Gillingham method. It is a highly structured, systematic and sequential program that allows students to reach skill mastery over 12 levels or steps. Steps 1 – 6 provide the basic sounds, blends and rules for syllabication. In steps 7 – 12, students learn alternative sound options, rules for spelling and morphological principles. The class provides direct instruction for decoding skills in conjunction with spelling skills.

Although the closely controlled vocabulary and lesson plan may be too restrictive or boring for some, it is exactly what's needed for many disabled readers. Its carefully sequenced skills, consistent lesson format, and repetitious routine enable many students who have failed with other reading programs to succeed at reading with the Wilson system. Students are chosen for the program based on teacher recommendations. Then, a screening process is conducted to identify the students who will benefit from this approach. The class meets twice a week.

Personally, teaching Reading Skills at MHS has been extremely gratifying for me. I have gotten the chance to work with some wonderfully hard working students. They appreciate the small class experience, and together we develop a close working relationship. The program and the environment enable the students to make steady gains as successful readers which translate into success across their other subject areas. The program allows students to turn a difficulty or challenge into a positive, enjoyable experience. I'm grateful for the opportunity to help so many students.

Susanne Flatley can be reached at flatley@mamkschools.org for additional information.

Highlights from Central School—Special Education

Quotes highlighting the fine work teachers do at Central School!

From the 5th grade team

“Having an inclusion class has been a true reward this year in many ways for both my students and me. The students see themselves as having two teachers to learn and grow with. The difference among the students is the opinions shared based on one's own thinking, not by how they look or how quick they learn. They are supportive of one another and understand that everyone has a pace in which he/she works and is greatly respected. Most importantly, we laugh with one another everyday; whether student or adult.”

From the 1st grade team

“Co-teaching is a wonderful opportunity to bring together the experiences of a general education teacher and a special education teacher. This model enables you to “see” children through another set of eyes.”

From Carol Houseknecht (Principal) and Edgar McIntosh (Assistant Principal)

“There are many kinds of inclusion that go on at Central school. We have self-contained classrooms, collaborative teaching classrooms and mainstreaming classrooms. While these are some of the existing classroom structures, inclusion is a philosophy that our whole community embraces. To us inclusion is the celebration and respect of different learning styles, speeds and methods. Inclusion is granting access, learning from each other, and rejoicing flexibility. In our school it takes many shapes. To name a few, CORE committee, differentiated instruction, peer mediation, translated communication, child care at PTA functions, reading buddies across grades, grade level “town meetings” and whole school assemblies. Inclusion can be as big a school program and as small as a second grader inviting a classmate to join a game of four-square.”

‘08-’09 PROPOSED STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES BUDGET GOALS

New Infrastructures

Submitted by Dr. Anthony Minotti, Assistant Superintendent for Student Support Services

Through a variety of presentations to the BOE, PTA Council, etc...the Curriculum Department and Student Support Services are collaborating to develop new infrastructures to address the goals outlined below, related to the 2008-2009 BOE budget request:

- Create cohesive general Response To Intervention (RTI) instructional support systems for all students, to reduce referrals to special education.
- Create programs and services within the district to reduce out of district private school special education student placements, and transition students back into the district, when appropriate.
- Create system-wide assistive technology resources to accommodate more opportunities for students with different learning modalities to improve their academic performance.
- Create specialized mandated school to adult life transition programs and services for students with disabilities grades 8 through 12.

We have carefully scrutinized Student Support Services budget request to reduce and reallocate resources for the new 5.5 proposed positions as listed below, totaling \$607,336.69.

1.0 Special Education Teacher - MHS - \$99,834.58 – (includes benefits) - to modify the present CORE program to appropriately service students in district and return students from out of district school placements.

1.0 Special Education Teacher - MHS - \$99,834.58 - to create a new program for students with developmental disabilities who are presently at the high school and return students from out of district placements.

- 1.0 School Psychologist-MHS – \$119,250.08 - (includes benefits) to create a new therapeutic program for students with social/emotional needs at the high school, and return students from out of district placements.
- 1.0 Transition Counselor-MHS - \$119,250.08. – to implement IDEA/New York State mandates for transition services for students with disabilities Grades 8-12.
- .5 Assistive Technology Specialist - Prek-12 - \$49,917.29 – to implement IEP mandated assistive technology devices for students with disabilities, and train staff to embed technology into the curriculum/instruction. The other .5 of this position will be funded through a grant.
- 1.0 Social Worker - MHS - \$119,250.08 - to support students in the APPLE program (Alt. Ed.) and other students-at-risk, who may be referred to special education at the high school.

A total of (\$1,479,985) was reduced from the 2007-2008 Student Support Services approved allocated budget, and from the original request (*) in the 2008-2009 proposed budget requests:

- *Supplies, Staff Development, Consultants (\$107,000)
- Out of District Tuitions (\$617,315)
- Aides (17), TA’s (10) (\$755,670)

Approximately \$872,648.40 remains for general education positions (i.e. 2.0 Reading Teachers Hommocks and MHS; Literacy Coach, Hommocks; Math Coach, Elementary; Learning Center Teacher, MHS, etc...). These positions become part of the new Response To Intervention (RTI) system-wide structure, providing early intervention general education direct instruction, reducing the referrals to special education.

If you have any further questions regarding the 2008-2009 Student Support Services BOE budget request, please email Dr. Minotti at, minottia@mamkschools.org.

EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT BOCES

For a while I have wanted to introduce our readers to the offerings of Southern Westchester BOCES.

Obviously in order to write effectively some research needed to take place on my part.

The more I researched the more I was amazed at a.) how much I did not know and b.) how much BOCES offers. Please read on...

I had no idea...

By: Amy Lieberman

The Board of Cooperative Educational Services offers a diverse range of programs and services to school districts in the southern Westchester region, ranging from special education to staff development to career and technical education for high school students.

What is BOCES?

The Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) is a regional public education collaborative that functions in New York State as an extension of local school districts. There are 38 BOCES throughout the state.

And Southern Westchester BOCES?

It provides more than 65 programs and services to 33 school districts, serving students in kindergarten through age 21. In addition, SWBOCES provides services to thousands of educators and adult residents in the Southern Westchester region.

How does BOCES work with local school districts?

BOCES determines ongoing educational needs that can be met most efficiently on a regional cooperative basis. BOCES also responds to and introduces program requests and initiatives from local districts and from the New York State Education Department. BOCES provides services, facilities and personnel to meet the mutual needs of local districts and receives and administers grants for a broad array of services available to students, staff members and community residents in local districts.

Can you provide a bit of history regarding The Southern Westchester Board of Cooperative Educational Services (SWBOCES)?

It was established in 1948 by the New York State Commissioner of Education and the Board of Regents to provide shared educational and management services to schools and school districts in our geographic region. The creation of BOCES was aimed at enabling small rural and suburban school districts to combine resources to obtain services that otherwise would have been cost-prohibitive and inefficient to tackle alone. By the mid 1950s cooperative

boards proliferated rapidly. Since their creation, BOCES has developed from special purpose interim agencies into formally recognized middle or intermediate units in New York State's public education system. All but 9 out of 721 school districts in New York State are BOCES components. SWBOCES has grown to offer hundreds of cooperative, cost-efficient services to school districts in the region, encompassing 187 different schools, 104,000 students, and more than 650,000 adults who live and work in Southern Westchester. (Please see fast facts below)

How is SWBOCES organized?

SWBOCES has seven Centers that provide a variety of services:

--The Center for Special Services offers special education services and programs, and runs classes on-site in 16 school districts and six other locations that include hospitals. The Center is well-regarded for its programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, its gifted special education program, and its program for students on the autistic spectrum.

-- The Center for Career Services operates a career and technical education program on its Valhalla campus, where some 800 of the region's high school students take half-day vocational classes in areas of study that include the culinary arts, fashion design & merchandising, television/media, graphic arts, cosmetology, and automotive technology. The campus also trains special education students in the trades, and operates an alternative high school.

-- The Department of Transportation services school districts with their transportation needs, particularly in transporting special education students. It also offers field trip services, bus maintenance services, and manages shared transportation programs for the Dobbs Ferry/Hastings/Irvington schools, and the Bronxville/Eastchester/Pelham/Tuckahoe schools.

--The Center for Interscholastic Athletics serves 80 high schools in Dutchess, Putnam, Rockland and Westchester, managing more than 40,000 schedule athletic events and overseeing the assignments of 2,500 sports officials.

-- The Center for Adult and Community Services provides educational programs, work preparation and community services to more than 8,500 adults and youths each year. The Elmsford center offers classes in licensed practical nursing, citizenship, GED, and ESOL, and an extensive continuing education program.

-- The Center for Professional Development and Curriculum Support provides dozens of staff development workshops for educators and administrators, many mandated either by New York State or by the federal No Child Left Behind legislation. For example, SWBOCES runs numerous workshops for educators on school safety and bullying issues, and trains teachers on how to score state assessments.

-- The Lower Hudson Regional Information Center offers educational technology services to 62 school districts in Westchester, Putnam and Rockland counties. It provides, among other things, Internet access, test scoring tools, data warehousing, Internet filtering services, financial information systems, and student information systems. Its instructional technology team trains school district staff, provides instructional software, and offers a popular distance education/videoconferencing service.

I have heard the term “component school district” – what exactly does that mean?

SWBOCES has 33 component school districts that participate in specific SWBOCES programs and services on a cost-sharing basis, and essentially share the cost of BOCES Administrative and Capital budgets based on a complex formula related to enrollment. Big city school districts in New York -- NYC, Buffalo, Rochester, Yonkers and Syracuse – are not permitted by law to become BOCES components. The decision to become a component district is based on the unique needs of a district. Both component and non-component districts can also opt to contract for specific services, and BOCES contracts are effective for one year. Districts that contract for BOCES services receive partial reimbursement from state aid. Once a district has joined a BOCES, it cannot withdraw and is obligated to pay its annual share of administrative, rental or facilities expenses.

Where does Mamaroneck School District fit into the scheme?

The Mamaroneck School District is a non-component district. Having said that our district does use BOCES services just as component districts do. Specifically we do contract with BOCES for many services including special education services, occupational education, and health related areas to name just a few. The difference is that we are charged a premium on top of the regular fee for each service that we use. The author consulted with the Dr. Fried, Superintendent of Schools, and is pleased to report that a cost analysis was done and the conclusion favored the status quo; that it is less expensive for us to continue in our current way as opposed to joining BOCES and paying the up-front cost to be a component member and the annual fees charged to members; membership is permanent.

Where are the BOCES offices located?

BOCES central administrative offices are in Rye Brook. The Center for Career Services and the BOCES Alternative High School are in Valhalla. The Collaborative High School is located at the Holy Trinity School in Mamaroneck. Services for adults, interscholastic athletics, professional development, and technology are coordinated from four office buildings in Elmsford. At the Rye Lake campus in North White Plains, you will find the Transportation Department and the Center for Special Services.

What is the organizational structure of SWBOCES?

The SWBOCES Board of Education is the policy-making board that oversees BOCES, and consists of seven elected members who serve three-year terms without pay. They are elected by and accountable to SWBOCES component school boards. All administrative and management decisions for SWBOCES are made by the Chief Executive Officer and District Superintendent, and his executive team. The District Superintendent also serves in an advisory capacity to all school districts in southern Westchester and facilitates communication between districts and the New York State Education Department.

In conclusion, although SWBOCES operates from dozens of locations throughout the county, it remains one of the best-kept secrets in local education. Although SWBOCES officials acknowledge that the public still has misconceptions about the organization, its programs have continued to diversify and grow as the needs of our local school districts have grown. With our districts facing new and unfunded mandates and requirements every day – new testing mandates, No Child Left Behind, safer schools, improvements in educating our disabled students – the need for BOCES and its expertise has only grown exponentially.

Fast Facts about SWBOCES

- Component School Districts: 33
- Educators served by Professional Development Programs: 17,000
- Sports officials assigned each year to public school athletic contests: 40,000
- Adults and youths served by continuing education programs: 8,500
- Miles traveled by SWBOCES buses each year: 1 million
- Educators who attended the SWBOCES Career Fair in 2008: 1,000
- Number of SWBOCES employees: 1,200

SWBOCES Operating Budget 2007-08: \$140 million

Special thanks to Evelyn McCormack SWBOCES Public Information Coordinator.

DR. SOIFER SPEAKS ABOUT AUDITORY PROCESSING DISORDERS

By: Amy Lieberman

What is an auditory processing disorder? What is a language processing disorder?

On February 13, at a SEPTA presentation, Dr. Lydia H. Soifer made the clear point that the terminology is the beginning of this very complicated and confusing maze; and with due respect to parents, for good reason, as controversy rages amid professionals.

Based on the turnout of about 150 people including, we are proud to say, administrators, teachers, therapists, and parents, it is a HOT topic. Dr. Soifer started by making these distinctions to help reduce the confusion. Language processing is the rate and efficiency with which we take in and make sense of language based information. Obviously with a hearing problem one might have difficulty processing language because it cannot be effectively received (heard). In contrast, the American Speech Language and Hearing Association says that "auditory processing disorder" is a deficit in the perceptual processing of auditory information by the central nervous system. Auditory processing problems are not hearing problems. Part of the confusion arises when people say that a child has an "auditory processing disorder or problem" when in fact they mean that the child has difficulty understanding the language being presented. This kind of comprehension problem can have many sources, e.g., vocabulary deficits, problems in grammar, lack of information, attentional problems and/or auditory processing disorder. Thus, Dr. Soifer commented that whenever someone contacts her about a child with an "auditory processing disorder", she asks, "What do you mean by auditory processing disorder?" The answer to the question helps her then begin the diagnostic process.

As Dr. Soifer noted, only an audiologist can make the formal diagnosis of auditory processing disorder. Such a diagnosis requires the administration and interpretation of very specific tests of how the brain processes acoustic (sound) information. In addition to the testing done by the audiologist, it is important to have an appropriate, comprehensive language evaluation completed as well. Together, the two assessments can lead to a fuller understanding of the child's language and learning needs in relation to any specific auditory processing difficulty and the potential impact on the youngster's language understanding and use both academically and socially.

Auditory processing disorders can manifest in various ways among children. Dr. Soifer also suggested a child should be over the age of 7 in order to be properly evaluated for auditory processing deficits.

Having said that there are some common characteristics set out in general terms below:

- Normal pure-tone hearing
- Difficulty understanding speech and language through the auditory channel and
- Difficulty in any listening situation with less than optimal conditions (acoustic distortions)

How does a processing disorder affect learning?

- A child may suffer from a short attention span because he/she may fatigue easily during listening talks
- A child may exhibit disruptive behaviors due to frustration
- A child may give the impression he/she is not listening or is daydreaming

If you suspect your child suffers from this challenge, you should know that different people are

affected in different ways, a diagnosis cannot be made in isolation and diagnosis and treatment require multidisciplinary coordination and co-operation.

Once a child has been identified as having these issues, what you do is important, as a child's ability to learn may be negatively impacted by language processing disorders.

In order to help your child, the following steps are a must:

1. obtain a proper diagnosis,
2. pursue appropriate remediation, and
3. enter into a partnership with your child's teachers and any therapists (etc.) to insure consistency in interventions and environmental modifications and supports.

According to Dr. Soifer, remediation can be in the following forms:

-compensatory training in auditory skills and /or

-cognitive and language training.

There is no medication for processing disorders.

There is no magic cure.

There is remediation.

For further information about auditory, language and learning problems you can contact Dr. Soifer at the Soifer Center for Learning and Child Development in White Plains (683-5401) or your school speech/language pathologist. We are fortunate in this district to have all ASHA certified therapists who are all knowledgeable in auditory versus language processing disorders.

Dr. Soifer suggested reading the book "When the Brain Can't Hear: Unraveling the Mystery of Auditory Processing Disorder", by Teri James Bellis

Please also refer to an article written by our district's Speech and Language pathologists in our November 2007 issue of Special Edition.

A REFLECTION

As we reflect upon our many years of working in Special Education, we can't help recalling the many children whose lives we have touched, but most importantly, the gifts these children have given us. What once began as a part time job over twenty years ago, has evolved into one of the most rewarding part of our lives.

We had no idea what the position as Aide in Special Education exactly entailed. When we were given the position, we were told that we would be assisting the teacher in whatever way he/she needed.

As a special education aide, we are the teacher's second set of eyes, ears and hands. With so many of the students needing almost one-on-one assistance, we soon realized what an important asset we are to this type of teaching environment. Looking back at all the students with whom we have worked, we can honestly say that they have gone on to lead successful lives, be it working at a fast food restaurant or going on to higher education.

As special education aides working with children with disabilities, we consider ourselves to be highly professional and dedicated to the work. Our teacher aide title (Para-Professionals, as we see ourselves) has often morphed into many other positions, such as a job coach, speech aide, one-to-one aide, remedial math aide, self-contained classroom aide and regular and enhanced aide in the district's Inclusion Program.

The job of a special education teacher aide, as with all good teachers, is about having passion and pride in what you do and in knowing you are able to enhance the lives of students with special needs.

Reflecting upon our twenty-two years of experience as Special Education Aides to children with disabilities, we see times of enrichment and enlightenment. We feel fortunate to have been able to give our time, dedication, and love over the years because of our spouses' continued support, financially and otherwise. The phenomenal teachers and fabulous students who have crossed our paths have inspired us and left imprints of wonderful memories on our hearts and souls. We hope they know how much we cared...and still do.

Let's Pay Attention — AD/HD Q & A

By Cecilia Absher

Q: What is AD/HD?

A: Attention Deficit / Hyper Activity Disorder (AD/HD) is a neurobehavioral disorder, which is characterized by problems with attention, impulsivity, and over activity, now has three recognized subcategories - Attention deficit – i.e. inattentive, hyperactive-impulsive and combined.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV (DSM-IV), published by the American Psychiatric Association, describes the three subtypes of AD/HD:

- Inattentive: cannot seem to get focused or stay focused on a task or activity
- Hyperactive: impulsive: very active and often acts without thinking
- Combined: inattentive, impulsive, and too active.

According to the NY State Education Dept website (http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/aewd/learndisability/ld_02.htm), which lists AD/HD as a special need that may affect learning, AD/HD affects an estimated 4 - 12% of the school age population. This can interfere with an individual's ability to focus for extended periods of time, or to break from focus in order to move forward. For some individuals with AD/HD, it is often difficult to filter key information from the distraction of sensory overload. Others may be described as having a 'racing-mind', which suggests information is processed so fast that key information for understanding is missed. AD/HD may adversely impact social interactions, personal relationships, time management, organization, anxiety levels, patience, and much more. Because everyone shows some of these behaviors at times, the diagnosis requires that such behavior be demonstrated to a degree that is inappropriate for the person's age. The diagnostic guidelines also contain specific requirements for determining when the symptoms indicate AD/HD. The behaviors must appear early in life, before age 7, and continue for at least 6 months. Above all, the behaviors must create a real handicap in at least two areas of a person's life such as in the schoolroom, on the playground, at home, in the community, or in social settings. Someone who shows some symptoms but whose schoolwork or friendships are not impaired by these behaviors likely would not be diagnosed with AD/HD. Nor would a child who seems overly active on the playground but functions well elsewhere typically receive an AD/HD diagnosis. (From NIMH)

Q: How is AD/HD Determined? By Whom?

A: To establish a diagnosis of AD/HD, clinicians will use the criteria set forth by the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV). The American

Academy of Pediatrics sets practice guidelines for the diagnosis of AD/HD. After ruling out other possible reasons for the child's behavior, the specialist checks the child's school and medical records and talks to teachers and parents who have filled out a behavior rating scale for the child (for

B: example the NICHQ Vanderbilt Assessment Scale – there are versions for teachers and parents). A diagnosis is made only after all this information has been considered.

If AD/HD is suspected, the diagnosis should be made by a professional with training in AD/HD. This includes child psychiatrists, psychologists, developmental/behavioral pediatricians, behavioral neurologists and clinical social workers. School psychologists may be a helpful initial resource for parents.

Q: If a child has been diagnosed with AD/HD will he automatically be classified and receive special education services or a Section 504 plan?

A: No, a diagnosis of AD/HD alone does not qualify a student for services or a Section 504 plan.

Q: Must children thought to have AD/HD be evaluated by school districts?

A: Yes. If parents believe that their child has a disability, whether by AD/HD or any other impairment, and the school district has reason to believe that the child may need special education or related services, the school district must evaluate the child for possible special education classification under the IDEA and if he doesn't qualify, then under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation. If the school district does not believe the child needs special education or related services and would not qualify under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and thus does not evaluate the child, the school district must notify the parents of their due process rights.

Q: When does AD/HD result in a special education classification? Must a child be physically disabled to receive services?

A: No. Children with mental disabilities or impairments may be eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (and New York law) or under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. For example under NY special education law, there is a classification called "Other Health Impaired" which is broad enough to include issues arising from AD/HD. Students with AD/HD may be eligible for special education under the category of "other health impairment" if they have limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to en-

vironmental stimuli that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment that adversely affects their educational performance. A student who has AD/HD may also meet the eligibility criteria for emotional disturbance or have a learning disability. The definition of a student with a disability includes a student with a disability who requires related services only, because "special education" is defined in a way that includes related services.

Q: If a child does not qualify for special education classification under the IDEA, what other options are there to receive services and/or accommodations?

A: Some students with AD/HD may not be eligible under IDEA, but may be eligible for services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. Eligibility for Section 504 is based upon the existence of an identified physical or mental impairment that *substantially limits* a major life activity (e.g. learning). The diagnosis of AD/HD is not enough in itself; his AD/HD must significantly impact his learning or behavior. In this case, the services would be documented in a written Accommodation Plan. Districts are responsible for evaluating all children who may need special education or a Section 504 Accommodation Plan, including students with a medical diagnosis of AD/HD. Moreover, in NY a student determined to be ineligible for special education or Section 504 must be referred to the building administration for a determination of what, if any, general education support services are appropriate for that student.

Q: May school districts have a different evaluation process for Section 504?

A: Yes. School districts may, but are not required to, have a separate process for evaluating the needs of students under Section 504. However, they must follow the requirements for evaluation specified in the Section 504 regulation. Section 504:

- Does not require an IEP, but does require a plan.
- "Appropriate" means an education comparable to the education provided to those students who are not disabled.
- Placement is usually in a general education classroom. Children can receive specialized instruction, related services, or accommodations within the general education classroom.

Provides related services, if needed.

For more information on Section 504, see the Mamaroneck School District's Policy 4322 (available under "District Information" at www.mamkschoolspta.org/SEPTA); The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Q: May a child with AD/HD, who is protected under Section 504, receive related aids and services in the regular educational setting?

A: Yes. Should it be determined that a child with AD/HD has a disability within the meaning of Section 504 and needs only adjustments and/or accommodations in the regular classroom, rather than special education, those adjustments are required by Section 504. Accommodations might include extended time to complete assignments and assessments, teachers checking for comprehension, teacher read instructions and preferential seating so the child can attend to the teacher better and be less distracted,

Q: How can students with AD/HD be helped in the educational setting?

A: According to U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (2004) available at LD Online, successful programs for children with AD/HD integrate the following three components:

- Academic Instruction;
- Behavioral Interventions; and
- Classroom Accommodations.

Read the article "Teaching Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder: Instructional Strategies and Practices" at <http://www.ldonline.org/article/8797> to learn much more about how to integrate a program using these three components and for suggestions for practices that can help children with AD/HD in a classroom setting. Many of the techniques suggested have the additional benefit of enhancing the learning of other children in the classroom who *do not* have AD/HD. In addition, while they have been used most widely with children at the elementary level, the practices are often useful for older students as well.

Q: Where can I go to learn even more about AD/HD?

A: Here are some additional resources you can access:

- (1) EDGov -- www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html
- (2) CHADD (Children & Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) -- www.Chadd.org
- (3) New York's Special Education Department -- VESID -- www.vesid.nysed.gov
- (4) Wrights Law -- www.wrightslaw.com
- (5) National Institute of Mental Health -- www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder-AD/HD/index.shtml
- (6) LD Online -- www.ldonline.org/indepth/AD/HD
- (7) Intervention Central -- www.interventioncentral.org

Also, read the next article about Jonathan Mooney.

Jonathon Mooney — Speaks Out About AD/HD & Dyslexia

Riding ‘The Short Bus’

Mooney Presents a New Perspective on “Normal”

By Paige Rentz (reprinted with permission from 12/14/07 issue of *The Sound & Town Report*)

Normalcy is myth, at least in the opinion of Jonathan Mooney. An author, public speaker, graduate of Brown University and sixth-grade dropout, Mooney, 30, talked about his struggle with dyslexia and ADHD before a large group of parents, students and community members at Hommocks Middle School Monday night. The event, sponsored by the Mamaroneck School District Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA), the Mamaroneck High School PTA and the Building Bridges program, also included a morning session with 350 students at MHS.

Mooney praised Beth Mullaney and Nancy Gardiner, chairs of the SEPTA programming committee, for being brave enough to bring him into the schools to speak with students. He recounts his struggles with frankness, and in language that resonates with the students, explains that for him and students like him, school is certainly less than fun. Though he graduated with honors with a degree in English Literature from Brown University and has authored two books, including his most recent, *The Short Bus: A Journey Beyond Normal*, Mooney stressed that he did not fix himself. He still reads in the 12th percentile and spells on a third grade level. Instead, he asserted, “If we’re here to fix anything tonight, it’s to fix systems that don’t work for students with cognitive differences.” Mooney concretely and systematically laid out the most problematic and stifling features of the current educational system and proposed necessary changes to foster success for those students with cognitive differences based on the three most common reprimands he heard as a child: that we was crazy, stupid and lazy.

Crazy

First, says Mooney, “you must reject the socialization of cognitive and physical differences.” A culture with narrow and arbitrary bounds for what it means to be good or smart creates a stigma for those students who do not fall within them. A system which prizes as “good” not those who are kind or compassionate, but those who sit still in a desk, places a stigma on students who learn better when they are in motion. “Dyslexia wasn’t my problem,” he said, “dys-teach-ia was my problem.” According to Mooney, perceptions must be reframed. Movement should be recognized as a means of focus, a proactive learning strategy. ADHD is not, a deficit of attention; it’s over attention. “Go to Wall Street, and they call it multitasking,” he quipped.

Stupid

A system which prizes standardized test scores and defines intelligence based on reading and writing eliminates a vast range of manifestations of intelligence. Mooney recounted a student who came to him with the complaint that at her school, people say “you’re smart at social studies, or you’re smart at math,” but they say “you’re good at art, or you’re good at sports.” Mooney insists that ADHD, dyslexia and other cognitive differences come with weaknesses, but they also come with strengths and talents. For instance, studies show a link between dyslexia and creativity, and a student with ADHD, though in motion, can often recount everything that’s going on in a room. Society must break with its narrow definition of intelligence as academics and learn to value other cognitive gifts.

Lazy

Lazy is a myth, says Mooney. Behind the myth of laziness are fear of public humiliation and learned helplessness. He claims that students are likely to be publicly humiliated at least once a day at school—citing reading groups and the playground as two of the most pervasive opportunities for humiliation—and these experiences hurt. Learned helplessness is the eventual result when organisms are continually in pain—with anger, depression (pain zaps your energy) and attempts to escape (drug, alcohol, suicide) coming before it on the spectrum. “Laziness,” says Mooney, “blames someone for being in pain.”

In recognizing the myth of laziness, one can find hope in learned helplessness because it can be *unlearned*. One way to do this is to present a positive image of a positive future for students with cognitive differences. Mooney knows from experience that this works. As a student at Brown, Mooney founded Project Eye-to-Eye, a mentoring program that began as five Brown students with cognitive differences mentoring five third-graders with similar labels. Now the program has 24 chapters in 13 states, with mentors and students of all ages.

The antithesis to the established deficit/remediation model, Project Eye-to-Eye is part of a larger model of empowerment. As a resolution to a broken system, Mooney lays out the elements of the model as he has developed it. A

model of empowerment must teach self-advocacy skills. Following the law of diminishing returns, remediation must be balanced by accommodation. At the point where remediation fails, explains Mooney, students must try something different. Finally, the empowerment model must build metacognition. Students must begin thinking about thinking. They must know their minds, and how they best learn, whether visually, auditory, kinesthetically or otherwise.

Mooney encouraged parents and teachers present at the event to look into starting a Project Eye-to-Eye chapter in Westchester or to become involved in the NYC chapter. Mullaney was unaware of any plans to begin a Westchester chapter, but said that it would be something that they would love to see in the school district.

Close to 200 people came to the event, and the event organizers were very impressed with the turnout. Both Mullaney and Gardiner were pleased to see many new faces and that parents of both classified and non-classified students were in attendance with their children, which had been a goal from the beginning. They organized the event because they believe that “Jonathan is a truly inspirational speaker who gives hope to kids who are struggling for various reasons and sends the message that poor school performance does not necessarily mean you’re not an intelligent person,” and felt that his message was one that should be shared not just with parents of classified students, but with everyone. Mullaney and Gardiner were “more than satisfied with his presentation and his willingness to stay until every last individual who wanted to speak with him got their chance.

A Word on Reading Readiness

When asked about Reading Readiness...Annie Ward, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction gave the following quote:

“A thorough screening process is important to assess children’s readiness as they enter Kindergarten. Anthony Minotti, Roni Kramer, and I have been discussing with elementary administrators the possibility of expanding the screening beyond its current focus on language skills to include phonemic awareness as a measure of reading readiness. We are also considering the timing of the screening

Noteworthy Information:

Mamaroneck School District Parent Workshops
9:30 -10:30 am—Central Elementary School

May 15: Alternative Treatments: Discussion of alternatives including nutrition and going ‘green’

June 14: Where we’ve been and where are we going?

Do you know?

The Regents of The University of the State of New York form the oldest, continuous state education entity in America. The Board of Regents and its State Education Department govern education from pre-K to graduate school.

SEPTA’s remaining program for this school year:
Thursday, May 29 Dr. Candida Fink
Hommocks Library at 7:30 pm

SEPTA’s Website contains lots of useful information! Check it out at www.mamkschoolspta.org/SEPTA
New: SSSH! -Parent Connection
Section 504 Policy & more!

School Budget Vote

Tues., May 20. Please vote at your local elementary school. 7a.m.—9p.m.

A special thank you to **Printcraft**,
960 Mamaroneck Ave, for helping SEPTA

Many thanks to all those who desired to impact our readers by submitting articles.

MAMARONECK SCHOOLS FOUNDATION AWARDS GRANTS THAT BENEFIT KIDS WITH NEEDS

On Monday, March 10 the Mamaroneck Schools Foundation (MSF) awarded 31 grants totaling \$270,000 for the 2008-09 school year. SEPTA is extremely grateful to the community and the Mamaroneck Schools Foundation for its generosity and commitment to the students in our District.

Two MSF grants, the first two below, are designated as specific to Special Education. Most of the grants will benefit all children.

Two Grants Specifically for Special Education:

Music Therapy - Mamaroneck Ave. A six-week program will be funded to evaluate the use of music therapy with some of the school's most disabled students. The Music Therapy Institute at the Music Conservatory of Westchester will offer group and individual sessions with students, teacher training, and parent workshops. Musical instruments and recording equipment are included in the funding.

Manhattanville College Partnership for School Aides & Teaching Assistants

This grant funds full-day training workshops for Special Education aides and teaching assistants, to be held on the four Superintendent Conference Days during the 2008-09 school year. The workshop sessions will be run by professors from the Special Education Department at Manhattanville College.

Grants that will help children with some particular academic or special needs are:

Class Amplification Through Microphones Murray Ave.

This grant funds six wireless microphone systems at the Murray Avenue School to be piloted in two classrooms each for grades 1, 3, and 5. These amplification systems are used throughout the country to help enhance the audio quality in the classroom and improve the learning environment. Students benefit from the use of sound-field amplification as the level of the teacher's voice over the ambient noise is increased. Long-range benefits include improved student attention, higher test scores, and possibly, a reduction in special education referrals.

Kindergarten Fine Motor Centers - All Elementary Schools

Following a successful pilot program, fine-motor centers will be set up in all of the district's kindergarten classrooms to help children develop the underlying skills required for tasks such as handwriting and cutting. Kindergarten teachers and occupational therapists will work collaboratively under the direction of Dr. Laurie Olson (the district's supervisor for occupational therapy) to set up this early-intervention program.

Listen While You Read - Murray Ave. and Central School

This grant will provide a collection of "Playaway" books to the Murray Ave. School library. Playaways are self-contained audio books that will allow elementary students to enhance their listening, learning and reading skills. A simple set of buttons allows them to listen at several speeds, fast-forward, reverse, and bookmark. There are no CDs to scratch, tapes to rewind, or downloads to manage.

Interactive Reading - Chatsworth

Under the direction of the reading specialist, an interactive computer program, along with the coordinating books, will be purchased to serve students in grades K - 2, students with reading difficulties in other grades, special education students and ESL students. This system will be used to supplement the current reading program.

READ with LEXIA - Central

This grant funds a pilot project for the first grade to provide computer software designed to build confidence and proficiency in reading and thinking skills. The software addresses the five critical components of reading instruction identified by the National Reading Panel: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Funds also include professional training in using the software..

Academic Literacy and Literacy Assistance - District-Wide

The CAP (Community Action Program) Center in Mamaroneck will provide free home-work help in the evenings for the at-risk population that the CAP center serves. This grant will help pay for staff to provide out-of-school support to students whose families cannot provide adequate academic support at home. Homework help will be provided by appointment and on a walk-in basis. This grant is funded by the Barbara Bennett-Rones Endowment.

This article is excerpted (with permission) from Jill Simpson's article that appeared in the Larchmont Gazette.

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SEPTA expresses its deep appreciation to the Mamaroneck Schools Foundation for awarding these very important grants which will help staff better assist children with learning differences and help those with special needs.

Learn about SEPTA's Grants on the next page!

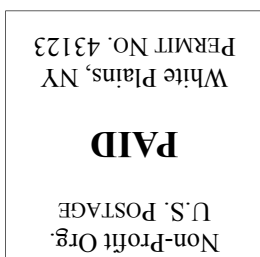
SEPTA NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!

SEPTA is the only organization that represents parents and teachers across all of the schools in the district.

SEPTA's mission, as shown on the first page of our newsletter, is very broad. -
- 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.

Our funding, needed for important grants and informational programs, comes only through individual support. We urge everyone who cares about meeting the needs of children and helping them succeed to become a member of SEPTA and to consider making a donation to help SEPTA achieve its mission.

Membership is open to all. To become a member or make a donation, please contact our SEPTA Treasurer, Sam Jensen—Email: samjjensen@yahoo.com Tel. 914-630-1816.



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