

Special Education Advisory Council Newsletter

*This newsletter is the result of a collaborative initiative between the
Special Education Advisory Council and the Mt. Lebanon School District's Special Education Department*

March 2008

Communications

Committee

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The Special Education Advisory council hosted its second annual panel discussion on March 26, 2008 called "Defining the Special Education System". Mount Lebanon professionals presented on behalf of their peers regarding their roles in the special education system. Panel members were as follows:

Robert Mallery - Principal, Markham Elementary School
Linda Beebe- Regular Education Teacher, Howe Elementary School
Ann White- Special Education Teacher, Mellon Middle School
Noreen Scholl-Winans - Speech/ Language Pathologist
Amy Winegarden- Parent

The questions and answer segment was especially informative, and educational discussions ensued throughout the evening.

We are already planning next year's panel discussion, but we'd like your ideas and feedback.

Please e-mail input for topics and panel members to rdjozwiak@aol.com or call the special education office at 412-344-2044.

Thank you!

The SEAC would like to offer a special thank you to the Mount Lebanon School District's PTA. The PTA added SEAC members to the agendas of PTA meetings at every district school for brief presentations of who we are and what we do.

THANK YOU, PTA!

Save the Date:

Thursday, June 5, 2008

Mt. Lebanon Recreation Center

3:00pm – 8:00pm

" Special Needs Private Pay Resources Expo"



COMEDY CENTRAL(R) Announces Live On-Air Charity Special 'Night Of Too Many Stars: An Overbooked Benefit For Autism Education' Hosted by Jon Stewart on Sunday April 13, at 8 p.m. ET
Appearances By Will Arnett, Matthew Broderick, Steve Carell, Stephen Colbert, Susie Essman, Will Ferrell, Tina Fey, Jonah Hill, Kevin James, Conan O'Brien, Rosie O'Donnell, Amy Poehler, Adam Sandler, Sarah Silverman, Triumph The Insult Comic Dog And Many More To Be Announced

**Linking Language, Literacy and AAC: Expanding and Advancing Abilities and Interests
Now for Success Later**

**Presenters: Linda Doernberg, MA Ed, Reading Specialist
Beth Sinteff, MS CCC-SLP**

"What we say can be written and what is written can be read". Words make sentences and sentences make stories. Making this connection is the first step down the exciting road to literacy! Join us for a two hour introduction to understand the major barriers for the AAC user and ways to melt them away using evidence-based instructional strategies. This presentation will include best practice examples of linking language and literacy instruction using AAC tools. Educators and parents are both responsible for literacy progress and are both welcome to this presentation.

Date: April 29, 2008

Time: 6 PM - 8 PM

Location: ACHIEVA

711 Bingham St
Pittsburgh,
PA 15203

Act 48 credits available. There is a \$10 processing fee. Please bring a check payable to Temple University .

RSVP 412-995-5000 x509 or

Email: klesko@achieva.info

Parent Resource Network is excited about a wonderful conference in Pittsburgh delivered by one of Parent Resource Network's friends, Joe Romano.

Please click on the link below about this free educational opportunity.

Certificates of attendance will be provided for CEUs.

The Critical Medical, Legal, Nursing and Funding Issues for Children and Adults with Cerebral Palsy, Spinal Cord and Traumatic Brain Injuries

**on Saturday, April 12th from 8-1pm at the Sheraton Station Square, Pittsburgh
Lunch included.**

For more information: <http://www.sci-tbiconference.com/>

You can register by calling 800.331.4134 or online at info@sci-tbiconference.com.

Please pass this information to anyone that might be interested in attending.

Please feel free to pass this email to family, friends, colleagues, and others that might be interested in this wonderful event.

See you there!

Kelly R. Fraasch, Founder

Parent Resource Network

www.parentresourcenetwork.org

Toll free: 8PRNISHERE (877.647.4373)

Mark your calendars for April 19th for our 1st annual Kid's Party at the Children's Museum starting at 6pm. Fun for all! For more details visit our website at

www.parentresourcenetwork.org

**Bureau of Autism Service of Pennsylvania Department of Welfare Announce:
Mini-grants of up to \$500.00.**

To support individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families that include an individual with ASD. Grant funds may be used for respite/child care, summer camp, recreational or community programs, conferences/workshops and safety modifications.

The application is available at the Bureau Website <http://www.autisminpa.org/>

Application must be completed and postmarked by April 18, 2008.



If you have specific information you would like to submit from personal experience or from research, please contact Debbie Jozwiak at rdjozwiak@aol.com or 412-344-4512. As a reader of this newsletter, we would like your input regarding topics you would like us to cover to serve as a support mechanism for other readers.

Your knowledge is the core of our purpose... educating and helping each other.



Transition: School-to-Work Information Session

High unemployment continues to be a serious problem for the disability community. Only 32% of Americans with disabilities aged 18 to 64 are working, but two-thirds of the 68% who are unemployed would rather be working (Provided by Stacy Kyle of the PA Business Leadership Network, www.pabyln.org).

There are ways both parents and school districts can improve this employment outlook for students with special needs. Transition planning formally begins when a child reaches the age of 14 during the length of the current IEP. Schools, parents, students and community agencies must work together to ensure students with disabilities are ready to face the world of employment and have the skills and aptitudes necessary to succeed.

To find out more about your role in the transition process, please join the Mt. Lebanon School District in an School-to-Work Information session. Parents of students with special needs currently enrolled in grades 8-11 are cordially invited to attend **Wednesday, April 16, 2008 from 6-8 pm at the High School** to learn more about Transition services and some of the programs available to prepare students with special needs for life after high school.

The night will include speakers from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Community College of Allegheny County Supportive Services for Students with Disabilities, the Allegheny Intermediate Unit Transition Coordinator.

Questions? Please call or email:

Jessica Webster

412.344.2048 or jwebster@mtlsd.net

for more information

ADVOCACY WORKSHOPS

**TO HELP DISABILITY ADVOCACY GROUPS
IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS!!**

ENROLL NOW TO ATTEND WORKSHOPS IN YOUR AREA!!!

Pittsburgh – May 6 @ Three Rivers Center for Independent Living Services

To Enroll or for More Information Contact DASH– Call toll free at 866-915-3274 (877-375-7139 tty) OR

send an email to ldo@drnpa.org

Please note that seating is limited and reservations are required.

No charge for workshops or materials

Special assistance such as interpreters available upon request

Workshop material is available in alternate format such as large print, disk or Braille if requested



specialneeds.mtlebanonlibrary.org

The Special Needs Website is the result of a collaboration between the Mt. Lebanon Public Library, Mt. Lebanon School District, parents, and the involvement of members of PAGE and the Parent Learning Support Network. Our committee also maintains an extensive paper file on special needs which is housed at the library, as well as a community bulletin board.

As a parent of a child with special needs within Mt. Lebanon School District, please consider joining our committee! For more information, please contact Jessica Webster by e-mail (jwebster@mtlsd.net) or phone (412-344-2048)—or Judy Sutton by e-mail (suttonj@einetnetwork.net) or phone (412-531-1913).

Toward Religious Inclusivity: Beyond ADA to Full Participation

For people of all faiths exploring ways of opening religious experience to people with special needs.

April 26, 2008 9-3pm

Southminster Presbyterian Church, Mt Lebanon

Registration fee of \$25 includes lunch. Scholarships are available.

For more information: 412.343.8900 or visit the website www.spchurch.org

Featured Speaker: Bill Stillman is the author of Autism And the God Connection, The Soul of Autism, The Autism Answer Book, The Everything Parent's Guide to Children with Bipolar Disorder, and a number of other wonderful books. Bill has worked in the disabilities field since 1987 and was employed by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare as the statewide point person for children and adolescents with learning differences, mental health issues and autism. Bill is an adult with Asperger's Syndrome.

Know a family who can use FREE tutoring?

Since the state is no longer offering its Classroom-Plus Grant program, **Total Learning Centers** is offering a similar program, called Beyond-the-Classroom[®]. The grant is for 2nd through 6th graders scoring below the 50th percentile in reading. Students are eligible yearly, based on an application signed by the principal of their school showing scores below the 50th percentile in reading on the same standardized tests approved in previous years by the state-funded Classroom-Plus Grant program. Please contact us at (724) 940-1090 to speak to an Education Consultant today about this free tutoring. The program is open to students in all school districts. We need your help getting the word out. Every parent should know about FREE tutoring! Please pass this information along to any parents or educators you know while space is still available. Together we can make a difference.



THURSDAY APRIL 24, 2008

2:00pm to 7:00pm

UCP/CLASS

4638 Centre Avenue

Pittsburgh, PA 15213

The Family Advocacy Network (FAN) will be hosting an Assistive Technology Vendors Fair that will enable you to see the newest technology first hand and to learn about services from the experts.

Vendors representing a variety of products will be together in the same room to answer any questions you might have.

During the day you will have the opportunity to hear from two speakers: one will talk about funding sources and another

will speak on what parents and educators need to know in order to help the child with a disability be successful when

choosing a communication device. Both are very important subjects.

We invite you and your family to take advantage of this opportunity to see what is available in assistive technology today.

We are looking forward to seeing all of you at this event.

All of this is being made possible by Community Living and Support Services (CLASS) of UCP.

For more information, call Connie at 412-683-7100

PaTTAN has developed the following product.

Title: **Resolution Meetings: A Guide for Parents and Educators**

Description: This guide will help parents and educators to have a better understanding of the resolution meeting, one of the ways in which special education disputes can be resolved.

To access this product via the PaTTAN website, go to www.pattan.net, go to **Resources** and click on **Publications**. Under "View Publications by Interest Area" - select **Alternative Dispute Resolution Options** from the drop-down menu. Under "View Publications by Material Format" - select **Guides** from the drop-down menu. Click **Search for Publications**

If you would like to receive hard copies of this product, please order online at www.pattan.net or email your request to Carol Bergman at cbergman@pattan.net.

Allegheny County Office of Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities and the CCAC, partnering with PaTTAN, Pittsburgh Public School and the Allegheny Intermediate Unit invites youths 14 and older, families/caregivers and the people supporting them to "Pathways to Possibilities" to be held at the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, 475 East Waterfront Drive, Waterfront in Homestead (AIU #3) Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

Saturday, 4/12/2008 - Benefit Planning Workshop and Resource Fair

All attendees must register for each session - contact Susan Kennedy, Community Training and Development, CCAC, at 412-237-6587 or skennedy@ccac.edu for registration information.

The Braille Forum

Friends-In-Art Scholarship Announcement

High school seniors and college students are invited to apply for the Friends-In-Art scholarship for the 2008-2009 school year. This \$1,500 scholarship is offered annually for achievement, talent, and excellence in the arts. If you are planning to major, or are currently majoring, in the field(s) of music, art, drama, or creative writing, and are a blind or visually impaired student and live in North America, you may apply for this scholarship. You may obtain an application form by writing to Harvey Miller, 196 E. French Broad St., Brevard, N.C. 28712-3410. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope when requesting the application. You also may request an electronic application by sending an e-mail to hsmiller@citcom.net. Applications and supporting information must be in the hands of the scholarship committee by the end of May 2008.

National PTA's Position on Special Education

http://www.pta.org/ia_pta_positions_1117830573078.html

National PTA believes that every child must be provided with a well-rounded, high-quality education, which will ensure that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential and become productive members of society. To develop a stronger and more accountable system of education, schools must place priority on student performance and achievement. Schools must focus on what children know and are able to do, and must be held accountable for ensuring that all children succeed. Challenging and precise standards that objectively measure achievement in academic areas must be developed to enable students to achieve at the highest levels possible.

A meaningful parent involvement policy ensures that parents play an active role in working with school districts to develop policies and materials, and are partners with schools in developing the instructional programs and/or other related services for their children.

National PTA believes that procedural safeguards in IDEA must be maintained to ensure that parents are fully informed of their children's rights and of their parental responsibilities in relation to their children's education.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The federal law that supports special education and related service programming for children and youth with disabilities is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) was enacted to establish grants to states for the education of children with disabilities. This law has been amended several times and is now referred to as IDEA.

The major purpose of IDEA is to ensure that all eligible school-age children and youth 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 employment and independent living. Furthermore, the law seeks to ensure that the rights of children and youth with disabilities, as well as the rights of their parents, are protected, and to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities.

Background

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was first enacted in 1975. This landmark legislation was needed to ensure that students with disabilities receive free, appropriate public education and the related services and support they need to achieve. IDEA was created to help states and school districts meet their legal obligations to educate children with disabilities, and to pay part of the extra expense of doing so.

IDEA has several parts: Part B provides grants to states for services to preschool and school-age children. Part C funds early intervention services for infants, toddlers, and their families. Part D supports research and professional development programs.

Approximately 6 million children currently receive special education services. When a child is identified as eligible for special education services, an individualized education program (IEP) is developed by a team that includes the child's parent(s), teachers, and other school staff. The IEP outlines the specific services and supports the child needs, within the least restrictive environment (LRE). While the law has been reauthorized and improved over the years, the IEP and LRE provisions have been protected as basic rights of children with disabilities. Parent involvement is a fundamental principle of IDEA. Parents must be fully informed of their children's rights, and may participate in all decisions affecting their children. IDEA also outlines due process provisions, which allow parents to challenge school district decisions.

The latest version of IDEA (P.L. 108-446), which reauthorizes IDEA through 2011, includes several provisions (strongly advocated by National PTA) that will improve the quality of special education. For example, the law retains continued services for students moved to alternate placements, attorney fee reimbursements for parents who prevail in litigation, and the requirement that schools determine whether disciplinable behavior is a manifestation of the student's disability.

Below is a preliminary analysis of some of the most important provisions of the IDEA reauthorization.

Discipline

The IDEA reauthorization retains the requirement that before disciplining a special education student, a school must consider whether the student's misbehavior was caused by his or her disability. However, a student may be removed from his or her regular classroom while that determination is pending. Under the reauthorization, parents must show that the disability caused the disruptive behavior; otherwise, the school may administer the standard discipline for the misbehavior. Previously, schools had the burden of proof and had to prove that the misbehavior was unrelated to the student's disability to be able to discipline the student. The law also gives educators more discretion in disciplinary decisions; educators are no longer required to consider unique circumstances when contemplating a change in placement, but may do so on a "case by case basis." As before, the reauthorization requires that students with disabilities continue to be provided education services when suspended or expelled for more than 10 days.

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

The new legislation modifies a number of IEP provisions to allow modifications to an existing IEP to be developed in writing instead of through a formal IEP meeting, and to allow a member of the IEP team to be excused from attending all or part of an IEP meeting with the written consent of the parent and the local education agency. An IEP no longer must include benchmarks and short-term objectives, except if the IEP is for a student who takes alternate assessments. An IEP is required to include a description of annual goals, how goals will be measured, and when and how periodic progress reports will be provided to parents. The reauthorization also includes a pilot program that allows up to 15 states to develop comprehensive multi-year IEPs (not to exceed 3 years) with parental consent. National PTA supported efforts to simplify and clarify the IEP process as long as it did not weaken important safeguards.

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http://www.pta.org/ia_pta_positions_1117830573078.html

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Teacher Quality

National PTA supported a provision ensuring that special educators are fully licensed in special education and competent in the subjects they teach. National PTA recognizes the multiple settings in which special educators deliver services, the diverse roles within which special educators function, and the variety of the individuals for whom they work. Under the new IDEA law, as under the No Child Left Behind Act, all special education teachers must hold a certificate in special education or pass a state special education licensing exam and hold a state license. New flexibility is provided for special education teachers to demonstrate that they are highly qualified if they are new to the profession, teach multiple subjects, or teach students working under alternate achievement standards.

Legal Process and Attorney Fees

Under the new law, parents are required to pursue mediation or attend other meetings to give school officials a last chance to resolve disputes before the courts may intervene. Complaints are required to be clear and specific, and filed within two years of the date of the alleged violation. Parents and school districts are permitted to collect the cost of attorney's fees if they are the prevailing party. National PTA helped prevent a stipulation that would have allowed governors to set a cap on the attorney's fees reimbursed. While the law now allows school districts to recover legal costs from attorneys for frivolous claims, it does not allow recovery of costs from parents—another National PTA victory.

Funding

National PTA is disappointed that the new law does not make funding for IDEA mandatory. The federal government currently pays less than half of what the original law authorized. The reauthorization lays out a plan for the federal government to fully fund IDEA within six years, but the actual amount must be appropriated each year during the annual budget process, so there is no guarantee that this plan will be carried out.



Tell Us Your Story!

*Voices of Our Region, a project of the
Allegheny County Disability Connection
would like to record your story.*

*All recordings will be put on a CD and available to
the public as a living history of the triumphs and
struggles people with disabilities have experienced.*

*If you are interested in recording your
story contact:*

*To celebrate and preserve the life
stories of people with disabilities in the
Western Pa. region...*

The Disability Connection

1-877-755-5222

TTY: (412) 350-5205

Frequently Asked Questions
Special Education in PA - FAQ
http://www.pde.state.pa.us/special_edu/cwp/view.asp?a=3&Q=67294

Who can I talk to concerning Special Education in my school district?

Call the district office and ask for the special education contact person. Each building principal is also aware of the procedure for obtaining special education services.

As a parent, is there someone in the Department of Education I can call?

Within Pennsylvania you may call the Special Education ConsultLine at 1-800- 879-2301. A special education adviser can answer or direct your concerns to someone who can help you. Outside of Pennsylvania, use the main number for the Bureau of Special Education -- (717) 783-6913 or TDD (717) 787-7367.

Where can I get copies of the regulations pertaining to Special Education?

A copy of the special education regulations and standards may be obtained by writing the [Bureau of Special Education](#) or by calling the main number.

I think my child is mentally gifted and entitled to additional programs and services. What should I do?

In Pennsylvania, mentally gifted students are entitled to specially designed instruction. Your school district can explain the process by which your child will be evaluated.

What is an IEP?

An IEP is an Individualized Education Program and is the written plan for the education of a student who has a disability or is gifted. The IEP is based on the individual student's needs and describes the special help the student will receive in school.

Are parents involved in the Special Education process?

Parents play a key role in determining the programs and services with which their child will be provided. Parents are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the determination of the appropriateness of their child's special education.

What is Early Intervention?

Early Intervention services are specially designed instruction for children age 3 to the age at which the school district's kindergarten program begins.

What is a Special Education placement?

A "placement" refers to the actual class and school a special education student attends where the student receives his or her special education program, and the type and intensity of services needed.

Can special education students be suspended from school?

Only under certain circumstances. There are special rules that apply to special education students.