

THE SOUTH RIVER ADVOCATE

Vol.5 Issue 2

The Newsletter of SEPTA of South River

October 2003

www.specialeducationpta.org

info@specialeducationpta.org

Information Line (732) 651-7157

Coming Events:

Oct 9: Special Ed Parent's Coffee 9:30-11:50

Oct 11: Town Hall Meeting with REP Rush Holt. South River Town Hall 1:30 – 3:00 pm.

Oct 16: South River Board of Education Pre-Meeting – Board Conf Room 7 pm.

Oct 20: NJ Coalition for Inclusive Education -Creating a Make Sense IEP: East Brunswick Public Library 7-9 pm.

Oct 20: South River Board of Education Meeting – High School Library 7 pm.

Nov 5: SEPTA Parent support group SR Public Library 6:30 – 7 pm

Nov 5: SEPTA Board Meeting SR Public Library 7–9 pm

Nov 12: Tinton Falls Special Ed Parent Group work shop, Advanced Advocacy. 6pm – Look for more detail next month.

Parents Coffee

First meeting of the year:
Thursday October 9th
9:30 – 11:30

A support group for parents and guardians of special education students is sponsoring monthly morning coffees during the school year. This informal group meets monthly. For more information and meeting locations call

Vivian Paulus (732) 297-4028

KidStuff Fundraiser

We'd like to thank the Parents, Teachers and Staff who helped with and purchased the KidStuff coupon book. We are still processing all of the orders and hope to get books out to people by the middle of October.

SEPTA would like to thank

Disability Services & Advocacy, LLC
www.dsauusa.net

For sponsoring the mailing of our Newsletters

Our Thoughts and Prayers

are with our troops in the Gulf and around the world. May they all come home safe and sound.



Being an Effective Parent of a Child in Special Education

Being a Social Worker and Advocate for people with significant disabilities once they leave school and live in the community I work with a variety of people and their families. As in anything, some clients and their families seem to be able to achieve unbelievable success while others never seem able to reach their full potential. I am always interested in why some families succeed and what it is that makes them successful. I ask questions about what they did when their child was young that enabled them to come as far as they did. Below is a list of observations of these activities and attitudes of a variety of parents with children with various disabilities. I hope it can assist you in defining actions and activities that you can use to achieve the best possible outcomes for your child.

Create A Vision Of As An Independent and Self-Determined Life As Possible And Make That Vision Happen

When many children with learning disabilities are born, it is not physically apparent that their child has a disability. Most parents have expectations built on their own life experiences, college or trade school, careers, marriage and an independent life. When successful families learn that their child has a disability, they seem able to overcome their fears and grief and continue to create and strive for a vision that emphasizes the skills necessary for an independent life for their child, as possible. As their child grows and matures that vision may change based on the needs of the child but successful families seem to emphasize and empower their child's own abilities to self-determine their own life. I have seen with my own eyes children with the most severe disabilities including severe Cerebral Palsy, Autism, and Epilepsy, many of whom are non-verbal that are encouraged by their families to express their individuality and preferences whether thru adaptive equipment or a trained family member that can interpret subtle clues on how their child feels. These families look for the ways in which their child expresses their wants and needs and listen and act on those preferences.

Create a Family Environment That Emphasizes Individual Responsibility

Simply because a child has a disability does it mean that the child does not have responsibilities. Successful families include disabled family members in the work process of maintaining themselves and the family home. While it may take a disabled child months to master a task and it may take them longer to complete most tasks or they may need assistance in completing the task, successful families' look for ways to teach independent living skills and have an expectation that all family members must participate in the work of maintaining themselves and the household.

Realize The Need For and Accept Help From Others To Achieve The Best Possible Outcomes

Basic household tasks or even self-help skills, such as, putting on one's clothes, bathing or cleaning up a bedroom can sometimes take hours for people with disabilities. Rather than parents doing it themselves and not allowing the disabled person the opportunity to learn these skills or even assuming the role of trainer, successful families use other family members (siblings, grandparents, cousins to assist in the training process). In some cases where family members are not available family friends can be of assistance. If necessary, families will pay for the assistance. The fact is that most children learn more successfully when trained by someone other than a parent. Not to mention the fact that many parents feel enough stress from trying to maintain careers and caring for the needs of their other children. In addition, by increasing the Circle of Support families are insuring that more people are involved in the life of their child. This has significant benefits later in life as these friends and acquaintances can assist in finding jobs, friends, roommates and even Support Personnel to assist the disabled person in living independently.

Understand The Disability, Join A Support Group and the Local PTA

Some disabilities have labels that help define the nature of the disability. Examples include: Autism, Dyslexia, Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, Mental Retardation, Mental Illness and Spina Bifida. Family organizations exist in the state of New Jersey that assist families' in learning about the latest treatments and strategies to assist the

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person with these disabilities. Understanding the disability is critical to achieve the best possible outcomes. In addition, these groups provide much needed emotional support for families and a place to form friendships, vent frustrations and share successes. You can find a list of organizations serving almost any disability on the internet using a search engine, such as, Google.

Successful families also join the local PTA. Some towns, like South River have a separate PTA devoted to the unique needs of Special Education. Other towns incorporate Special Education needs into the regular PTA. These families realize that to obtain the best education for their child they need to understand the educational process in their own town and to ensure the educational system meets the needs of all the children.

Make Learning A Family Priority and Celebrate Success

If the family values learning, the child with a disability values learning as well. Successful families have a study area away from television set for all their children. Parents need to ensure that their child is progressing. Communicate with your child and see how they are doing. Successful families attend the IEP meeting and advocate for the educational needs of their child. My former partner's son had severe multiple disabilities including a significant expressive communication disability and behavior issues. Somehow, he learned to read, focus and complete tasks. His mother celebrated her son's success and he was proud of his accomplishments. These skills enabled him to secure two jobs when he graduated from school and made him the Transition Student of the Year.

Form Partnerships With The School Personnel and the Social Service Agencies Supporting Your Child

Successful parents take the time to learn how things are done in their School and School District. They learn how to advocate effectively without alienating the people they need to work with. They take the time to compliment people when they do a good job and try to compromise when possible.

When their child is transitioning to a post-school life they learn about the support mechanisms available to students with disabilities going to college or they understand the supports through the Social Service system if their child is going to work. This includes agencies such as, Social Security, County and NJ Transit Transportation Services, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), Medicaid and the Division of Disability Services. If you want more information on these organizations visit my website www.dsausa.net.

Become Extremely Organized and Document All Interactions With The School and Social Service Agencies

Special Education is an extremely document intensive process. Organizing various reports from Doctors, Therapists and the School is critical to maintaining control and understanding. It is also essential to be able to write letters thanking teachers and therapists for a job well done and review outcomes of meetings, such as the I.E.P. One of the best tools for understanding the organizational for effective parental advocacy is the book, "From Emotions To Advocacy" written by Pam and Peter Wright. This book provides very practical steps to understanding the Special Education process and getting a control of the paperwork and protecting your rights.

SEPTA is selling "From Emotions To Advocacy" at a reduced rate. Contact Bill Sellars at 732-613-5144 if you would like a copy.

Parents Obtain Adequate Life Insurance and Save Money For The Future Support Needs of Their Disabled Child

I work with adults living either at home or in the community. My clients, in most cases have significant disabilities and are receiving services from the Division of Developmental Disabilities. While DDD provides substantial financial support for staff to assist clients and in the purchase of adaptive technology they recently decided to end direct funding for housing for people with Developmental

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IDEA UPDATE

The House of Representatives has passed a bill to reauthorize IDEA (H.R. 1350) that effectively guts many of the important protections and provisions of the law. The major change to the discipline provisions, give schools to unilateral authority to change the placement of students without regard to their disability, unless the parents request a 'manifestation determination'. The Senate version preserves the current IDEA requirements.

The House version also requires states to offer binding arbitration, with no appeal provisions and establishes a one-year statute of limitations to resolve disputes. The Senate version has no provision for binding arbitration, and sets a two-year statute of limitations, from the time that parents should have known about the violation.

Neither version provides for full funding of IDEA. Congress in the initial IDEA promised to pay 40% of the cost of special education, this year Congress has approved an all-time high of 18%. The House version also allows 15% of the IDEA funding to be used to serve students who do not have a disability or need special education services. Both the House and Senate versions eliminates short term objectives from IEP's while the House version make 3 year IEP's optional.

There are rumors of an amendment to the Senate bill which would exempt Special Education students from making the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) as required in **No Child Left Behind**. This would allow school district to LEAVE OUR CHILDREN BEHIND.

WHAT'S NEXT

The bill now goes to the Senate floor for possible amendments and a vote. After the Senate passes the bill, a Conference Committee (made up of members of both the House and Senate) will meet to resolve the differences between the House and Senate bills. There is still time to call or write your Senator or Representative to share your views.

US Senators

Jon Corzine
502 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
(202)224-4744

Frank Lautenberg
324 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510
(202) 224-3224

US Representative

Rush Holt
1019 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515-3012
(202) 225-5801

Congressman Rush Holt
Will be holding a
Town Hall Meeting
Saturday, October 11
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.
South River Town Hall
61 Main St, South River
Come and tell him how you feel

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Disabilities. Parents will now have to assume the responsibility for future housing for their child. It is therefore critical for families to begin savings for future housing and additional other supports not provided by DDD. To this end I recently proposed Federal legislation for the creation of a Disability Support Custodial Account that would provide tax benefits similar to those provided by a 529 educational plan but will allow distributions for the future support needs of a person with disabilities including housing.

If a child does not have significant Developmental Disability but only a learning disability saving money is also important particularly if the economic independence of the child may be at risk because of the learning difficulties.

I see first hand that those families that financially provided for their disabled children ensure that these children have options and choices not available to families that rely exclusively on government benefits. Of course, remember that savings should not be in the name of the person with a disability because this can make the disabled person ineligible for government benefits. Families should consider creating a Special Needs Trust in their will to not jeopardize government benefits, such as Medicaid or service from DDD.

In conclusion, while this is not a scientific analysis it provides some guidance and information based on my personal experiences working with people with disabilities. I hope you find this information useful and I look forward to seeing you at the next SEPTA meeting.

Bill England

Haunted House Fun

East Brunswick 4H is running a Haunted House at their buildings off Cranbury Rd. in East Brunswick.

Friday & Saturday nights in October at 7pm.
Admission is \$1.00

Kidspiration

Computer program, that SEPTA donated to the Public Library has been installed on one of their computers in the main section of the library.

This Computer Program can help your child Grades K-5 do various homework assignments like Reading, Writing, Science, and Social Studies. It has the added bonus of letting you print out the work.

Cut Here and return membership form to SEPTA

Membership Application

2002 – 2003

Name _____

Membership Type

Address _____

Parent _____

Faculty/Staff _____

Other _____

Phone _____

E-Mail _____

of memberships _____ X \$4.00

Tax Deductible Donation _____

GRAND TOTAL _____

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Help Wanted:

Mothers and yes even Fathers or Grandparents who are concerned with their child's education are wanted and NEEDED by SEPTA to help-out on a variety of projects. We realize how crunched for time everyone is, especially parents of Special Needs children are so it does not matter how much or how little time you can help out, or when that time of day is. In as little as 1 hour a month you can help SEPTA, help you and other parents of Special Needs children.

Would you like to help with our Newsletter, or Website? Have you come across an interesting book, article or website that deals with education, special ed., disabilities, or parenting? that you'd like to share with others. Write a short summary and we'll love to put it in newsletter and webpage.

Are you interested in the re-authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that is coming up in Washington next year? We'd love to have you help and the National PTA has a lot of resources and information available on the IDEA, all you need to do is ask.

If you are interested, please come to one of our meetings, call our Information line or e-mail us. We would love to hear from you

“To produce great schools worthy of a great nation, we must also change our hearts and our minds. We must let go of the myths and perceptions about who can learn and who can't.”

- Rod Paige, Secretary,
U.S. Dept. of Education

Cut Here and return membership form to SEPTA

In Order to serve you better please take a moment to fill out this questionnaire:

Do you have a Special Needs Child/Children Yes ___ No ___

If so what are their ages

Do you have access to E-mail Yes ___ No ___

Would you like information sent to you via E-mail Yes ___ No ___

Do you have access to the World Wide Web?
(Free access is available at most public libraries including South River Public Library) Yes ___ No ___

Would you be interested in information distributed over the Web? Yes ___ No ___
What topic or subject would be of interest to you?

How can SEPTA help you and your child?

Would you be interested in being on one of these committees?

Fundraising	_____	Refreshments	_____
Membership	_____	Special Events	_____
Speakers	_____	Legislative	_____
Other	_____		