

THE SOUTH RIVER ADVOCATE

Vol.5 Issue 3

The Newsletter of SEPTA of South River

November 2003

www.specialeducationpta.org

info@specialeducationpta.org

Information Line (732) 651-7157

Coming Events:

Nov 20: South River Board of Education Pre-Meeting – Board Conf Room 7 pm.

Nov 24: South River Board of Education Meeting – High School Library 7 pm.

Dec 2-3: NJPTA 103rd Convention in Atlantic City

Dec 3: SEPTA Parent support group SR Public Library 6:30 – 7 pm

Dec 3: SEPTA Workshop Reading Strategies for home and School. SR Public Library 7–8:30 pm

Dec 3: New Jersey State Bar Foundation Special Education Seminar

Dec 18: South River Board of Education Pre-Meeting – Board Conf Room 7 pm.

Dec 22: South River Board of Education Meeting – High School Library 7 pm.

Parents Coffee

Meets weekday mornings 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

Meetings dates for next year are:

Thursday, January 8

Tuesday, February 10

Thursday, March 11

Thursday, May 13

SEPTA would like to thank

Disability Services & Advocacy, LLC

www.dsausa.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.



From the Desk of Lisa Michallis, Director of Special Education

In 1995, I joined the South River educational community as a Special Education Teacher. During the past several years I have served varied roles as an educator and Learning Disability Teacher Consultant on the Child Study Team. Recently, I was named Director of Special Education. It is an honor to serve our students and district in this capacity. This year there are many positive changes in our district and I too, have goals for improving our department.

The first goal for the 2003-2004 academic year is to improve student literacy skills and build their confidence in reading and writing tasks. At the elementary and secondary levels, innovative computer and internet-based programs are being employed. *Fast ForWord* is being implemented at the Elementary School and Compass Learning's *Odyssey Program* will be utilized at the High School level. The main goals of these computer programs are to develop literacy skills and increase student achievement.

At the Middle School level, the focus is geared towards preparing students for the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA). Teachers' lesson plans and activities integrate individual student objectives outlined in their Individualized Educational Plans and New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards.

Increasing parental involvement coupled with improved communication between home and school is the second goal. As a parent/guardian, you are a member of the IEP Team. Parents/guardians are able to supply information regarding strengths and weaknesses of a child and provide insight into their developmental and educational history. During the course of the year, you will be contacted via telephone and letter inviting you to a variety of meetings including an annual review. As an IEP Team member, you will also participate in IEP Team Meetings and Parent-Teacher Conferences. These are excellent opportunities for you to keep up to date of your child's progress.

There are also a variety of supports available at school for both you and your child. Each student is assigned a Contact Teacher, who monitors students and keeps in contact with all educators involved in their program. If you have any concerns or questions regarding class assignments, projects, school activities, or student performance, this is the primary person to contact. Each student is also assigned a Case Manager, who is part of the Child Study Team. This person will contact you to schedule re-evaluation meetings, annual reviews, or to discuss programming issues. Become familiar with these other members of the IEP Team.

Through collaboration and effective communication, as a team we can make a difference!

I look forward to meeting you on December 3rd, and beginning our journey together building literacy skills and a partnership in educating your child.

Does Your Child Have an Undetected Vision Problem?

While a child may have "20/20" eyesight, he or she may still have a problem with other visual functions that are essential to reading, comprehension, and physical activities.

Developmental optometrists use the term "learning-related vision problems" to refer to problems with near focusing, eye coordination, depth perception and peripheral vision, or a crossed or wandering eye. Children labeled slow learners or as having behavioral problems may have a learning-related vision problem and there are other signs that parents and teachers can look for in their kids.

Physical Signs

- One eye turning in or out
- Squinting
- Eye rubbing or excessive blinking
- Headaches after reading
- Head tilting or closing one eye when reading

Performance Signs

- Omits or rereads letters/words
- Confuses similar looking words
- Poor reading comprehension
- Letter or word reversals after the first grade
- Poor handwriting; misaligning numbers

Secondary symptoms

- Low self-esteem
- Short attention span
- Fatigue and/or stress

For more information visit the College of Optometrists In Vision Development's website at www.covd.org

Re-printed from Our Children, The National PTA Magazine
November/December 2003

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 (S. 1248) preserves the current IDEA requirements.

There will be an amendment to the Senate versions limiting attorney fees similar to the one in House version

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 scares 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.

WHAT'S NEXT

Efforts are being made to stall bringing the bill to the Senate floor for a vote. This strategy may result in attaching the House bill to an omnibus act so that it becomes law. Therefore, even with the problems in the Senate bill, we want it to come up for a vote.

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.

What you need to Do

- Speak out against any sneaky moves to make the House bill law and bypass the senate. Urge your Senators to
 - Bring S 1248 to the floor and Vote on it.
 - Not allow limits on families' ability to find legal counsel and receive adequate reimbursement
- Contact the Senators on the Conference committee and the Health, Education, Labor and Pension committee. Send letters highlighting areas you support and areas of concern, as well as Senate Leaders and our Senators from New Jersey.

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

Attention Middle School Parents

Several eighth grade students are participating in the Career Exploration Program sponsored by the Middlesex County Vocational and Technical Schools.

This program exposes students to a sampling of careers to assist in transition planning for secondary school and post-secondary outcomes.

If you are a parent of a seventh or eighth grade student enrolled at the Middle School, contact the Office of Special Education for further information regarding this beneficial program.

SEPTA & South River Public School Workshop

Reading Strategies for Home and School

Wednesday, Dec 3, 2003

7- 8:30 p.m.

South River Public Library

55 Appleby Ave

Special Guest Speakers:

Mrs. L. Michallis
Director of Special Education
South River Public School

Mrs. C. Colalillo
Reading Specialist & Teacher
South River Public School

Learn Strategies that parents can use at home to improve and help their child improve their reading skills.

See a demonstration of the new "FastForWord" being used in the Elementary school

- Learn about the exciting new program being implemented to help make reading easier for your child is beginning to read
- Fast ForWord is a computer based reading intervention product that rapidly develops the language and listening skills for reading
- Students, on average, who work with the FastForWord program make language and reading gains of 1-2 years in just 4-8 weeks of using this program
- As the child uses the FastForWord program it adapts to the students progress providing efficient, targeted training in the areas of need
- FastForWord has a built in component that displays comprehensive program information so teachers can see exactly how each student is progressing on specific skills

New Jersey State Bar Foundation

Presents

A Free Seminar for the Public

Special Education Law

*"Everything you Always Wanted to Ask About
Special Education: Parent's and Schools' Rights and Responsibilities"*

Wednesday, Dec 3, 2003

7 -9 p.m.

New Jersey Law Center

An opportunity for dialogue with three experienced practitioners of special education law on topics including, but not limited to:

- The Role of Methodology and Teacher Qualifications in Obtaining a Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Reading Disabilities
- Eligibility and Services for Preschool Students and What Constitutes the Least Restrictive Environment
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Dispute Resolution Alternatives

Admission is FREE, but registration is required. To register, or for additional information call 1-800-FREE LAW or 1-800-373-3529. Please leave your name, daytime phone number and the seminar name.

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Future SEPTA Events:

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

February 4 SEPTA workshop SR public Library 6:30 Learn how to Manage It All. Having a child in the Special Education System can be overwhelming at times Using simple strategies and effective system you can accomplish it. Reduce you stress and help your child all at the same time! (Registration deadline January 22, 2004 Fee \$5.00 per person to cover materials)

March 3: SEPTA Parent support group SR Public Library 6:30 – 7 pm

March: Transition planning workshop – guest speaker Alice Honeycut

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

April: Look for SEPTA Scholarship applications

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

June 2: SEPTA Parent support group SR Public Library 6:30 – 7 pm

Help Wanted:

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 web page.

SEPTA of South River
81 Johnson Place
South River, NJ 08882

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