

SEPTA would like to thank
**Disability Services
& Advocacy, LLC**
www.dsausa.net

For sponsoring the mailing of
our newsletters.

Inside this issue:

Social Skills and the LD child: insight to a complex problem	1
VSA/NJ Awards : student Art Excellence Award and	1
<i>On the Bookshelf: Self Esteem Boosters...</i>	2
News from the Web: Assistive Technology	2
<i>Positive Traits and Teacher Pleasing Techniques</i>	2
<i>To Inspire You: "Grounded Lessons"</i>	2
SEPTA Holiday Party: "The Polar Express	inset
NJ State Bar Foundation free seminars	3
SEPTA social group	3
Upcoming Events	6

The Advocate

The Advocate is the free public newsletter of the Special Education PTA of South River.

Published monthly from August to June of each year by the Executive Board Members of the SEPTA - this newsletter is mailed directly to families of classified students of the South River Public School District from the Office of Special Education. Additional copies are available at the South River Public Library. Past editions of the Advocate can be downloaded from our website. Interested individuals may sign up for our electronic newsletter and a listing of other newsletters related to special education issues by visiting our website at:

www.specialeducationpta.org

Questions related to the Special Education PTA as an organization, the services we provide, and our calendar of events can be answered by telephone at: (732)651-7157 or by email at info@specialeducationpta.org

If you would like to submit letters or articles, post information or contribute pictures to be included in future editions of the Advocate please contact our newsletter by email at: SRPTAAAdvocate@aol.com

The **Advocate**

*"Every Child is Born with Wings...
Make it a Choice to Educate
and Advocate for the Chances for
All Children to Learn to Soar"*



*Social skills and the LD child:
insight to a complex problem.*

For those of you who may have missed SEPTA's last workshop: Social skills and the LD child you missed a very straightforward and direct way for parents to help their classified child tackle this "huge" hurdle in their lives.

representatives believe that the association with the student's "peers" in mainstreamed activities with help facilitate the acquiring of social skills by the learning disabled child (in essence they will learn by example).

So what do we do to help our children learn "social skills" and just why are they so important for learning disabled child to master?

Every year at your child's annual Individual Education Plan (IEP) meeting most parents and school officials seems so concentrated on the academic goals and the necessary related services a student may need that little thought is actually spent or discussed on the social skills aspect of a child's IEP plan. Most parents/ school

Knowing your child- would you be able to say that they could accurately learn from example from the experiences viewed at home? When you reprimand their sibling for jumping on the couch do they not try the same thing as soon as your back is turned? If your child is like most- we can safely assume the answer to that question.

Rich Lavoie in his PBS presentation, "Last one picked...First One Picked On: Social Skills and the LD Child" made some interesting points for parents (and school officials) to understand.

First let us look at the definition of "Social Skills." A social skill is the different ways to socialize & interact.

Continue to page 3

VSA/NJ Awards:

Student Arts Excellence Awards and Art Par Excellence traveling art show

VSA arts, a nonprofit group based in New Brunswick, is now accepting applications for the 2005 Arts Achievement Awards and "Art Par Excellence" statewide touring exhibit.

not exceed the grade 12 level and must show outstanding achievement in and commitment to an art form. Deadline for submitting an application is Jan. 7, 2005.

Each school may submit one piece of work. Artists will be recognized at an opening reception. Application deadline is Jan. 28th, 2005.

The *Student Arts Excellence Awards* are given to students ages 14-21 with disabilities that are classified (mainstreamed, inclusion, self-contained classes or activities). Students must

The "Art Par Excellence" exhibit will feature original two-dimensional art work by students with disabilities. The age categories are students younger than age 12 and ages 12-21.

For application and registration information call VSA/NJ at (732)745-3885, (732)745-5935 or (732)745-3913 (TTY)

NEWS FROM THE WEB:

www.amazon.com

Amazon and Premier Assistive Technology Inc. have now teamed up to bring assistive technology to the masses.

Amazon.com will be offering 9 different software titles through its online store:

- *Universal Reader
- *Universal Reader Plus
- *Scan and Read Pro
- *Ultimate Talking Dictionary
- *PDF Magic Pro
- *Text to Audio
- *Talking Word Processor
- *Talking Checkbook
- *Premier CD/DVD Creator

Premier Assistive Technology provides assistive reading technology software at affordable prices.

On the Bookshelf:

Self- Esteem Boosters:

Fun activities parents can do with their children to boost self-esteem

Barbara Sher author of the book entitled, "Self-Esteem Games: 300 Fun Activities that make children feel good about themselves", sharing upbeat, thoughtful activities you can reinforce your child's positive feelings and provide a lasting foundation for learning.

Some highlights on the book are:

- *Knowing your strengths and abilities
- *Expressing everyday feelings and reactions
- *Enjoying being unique- like everyone else
- *Building relationships by being with friends and trusting others
- *Building confidence by getting to know your body and senses.

These self-esteem building ideas can be played anywhere and requires no special preparations or equipment. So pick up this book at the South River Public Library and have some fun with your children today.

Adapted Activity from "Self - Esteem Games: 300 Fun Activities that make children feel good about themselves."

Pal -of -the-Day

Either have one family member lie down on a piece of paper to have their body traced or use a picture of that person on a piece of paper. Each family member takes a turn writing positive comments about the person. Then for the day that person gets to pick the activity or event that they particularly like. If other siblings complain- remind them that their day is marked on the calendar (and make sure it is!)

This is a simple activity that promotes / celebrates the uniqueness of the individual and makes the person realize the positive traits they possess that are appreciated by others.

This book is located in the SEPTA Parent Resource Collection in the So. River Public Library

To Inspire You:

Grounded Lesson

By Mattie J.T. Stepanek

Life is a Treasure.

People should enjoy it,

Even if digging

To it, or

Through it,

Is a challenge.

February 2000

From: Journey through Heartsongs

Mattie J.T. Stapanek was a remarkable 13-year-old boy who "wowed" the world with his messages of peace, hope and courage. Though his life was ended at such a young age, he accomplished the publication of 5 poetry books and promoted work for world peace with such dignitaries as former President Carter and talk show host Oprah Winfrey. He served as the MD Association Goodwill Ambassador in 2004.

Positive Traits and Teacher-Pleasing Techniques

Simple things your child can use to improve their social skills

"NO SWEATS" -Teacher pleasing techniques parents can teach their children:

- *Be punctual / on time
- *Establish eye contact
- *Participate in classroom
- *Use teacher's name when addressing them.
- *Submit work on time
- *Use the required formats set by the teacher (ex. using pen instead of pencil)
- *Avoid crossing things out in work
- *Request explanations (how to ask for help)
- *Thank teacher after every class as they are leaving the room.

Positive social skills traits exhibited by children:

- *Smiling and laughing
- * Greeting others
- *Extending invitations to others (involving others in activities)
- *Conversing with others
- *Sharing with others
- *Giving compliments to others
- *Maintain a good appearance in clothing and personal hygiene.

From Social Skills and the learning disabled child with Rick Lavoie: "Last One Picked ...First One Picked On"

New Jersey State Bar Foundation offers free seminars on Special Needs Interests

"Medicare-Medicaid Maze"

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation will present a free public seminar on navigating through the "Medicare- Medicaid Maze" on Thursday, November 4, from 1 to 3 pm at the New Jersey Law Center, One Constitution Square (off Ryders Lane), New Brunswick.

Speakers for this evening are Marilyn Askin of West Orange and Thomas D. Begley Jr. a member of the law firm Begley & Bookbinder . The program will feature an explanation and update of Medicare, a federal program of health insurance, Medicaid and New Jersey programs designed to provide health-care coverage to the poor, the disabled and the elderly. Planning for long-term care insurance also will be covered. A question-and-answer period will follow.

The seminar is free and open to the public. Advanced registration is required. To register or for more information on Foundation seminars, programs, and publication, call 1-800-FREE-Law.

"Special Needs, Trusts *and Guardianships"*

The New Jersey State Bar Foundation will present a free public seminar on "Special Needs, Trusts and Guardianship for People with Serious Disabilities and Mental Illness" on Thursday, November 4 from 7 to 9 pm at the New Jersey Law Center, One Constitution Square (off Ryders Lane), in New Brunswick.

Bridgewater attorney Lawrence A. Friedman will discuss government disability benefits, common estate planning errors, estate tax concerns, special needs trust planning, and guardianships. A question- and -answer period will follow the presentation.

This seminar is free and open to the public. Advanced registration is required. To register or for more information on Foundation seminars, programs, and publications, visit www.njbf.org or call 1-800-FREE LAW.

**Interested in joining a group where your child
can enjoy the company of his/her friends,
enjoys crafts, and planned family activities?**

**SEPTA is now in the planning stages
to form such a group.**

**Parents who are interested in helping to plan and form such a
group, please call Barbara at (732) 316-6323 or Pat at (732) 221-7100.**

Social Skills and the LD child....*continued from page 1*

Every environment you place yourself in requires knowledge of or a mastery of some social skill. The major concern of parents of a learning disabled child is the fostering of social competence. "Social competence" is not another word for "manners"- it is a complex combination of social information and capabilities. If you child can't read - environment can adapt by providing books on tape. If you child cannot write- environment can be adapted by use of a word processor.

There is no adaptation for social skills deficits. Social isolation and social rejection is the most often the outcome when a learning disabled child does not know or master social skills for a situation or environment.

Let's look further into social skills and the learning disabled child. Social skills for this child can not be learned through observation of "good social skills" practiced by their peers. If that thought was true the learning disabled child would have learned good social skills in the home environment first. For the learning disabled child, social skills must be taught and reinforced. Children who have social deficits generally manifest in the following behaviors:

Poor at independent activities (homework, babysitting)

Poor judging the moods and attitudes of others

Insensitive to the general moods of a social setting

Continually doing, saying inappropriate things.

The child with social skills deficits spends lonely hours of isolation and experiences countless incidents of painful rejection.

Often the learning disability will facilitate social skills deficits. In understanding how a child's learning disability may affect a child's social skills let us look at the following:

Interrogative: definition of which means the ability to ask questions of others- which is used to sustain a conversation or to ask assistance from others. A learning disabled child often cannot ask questions of theirs. Often they phrase what should be an interrogative question into a statement.

Attention Deficit Disorder- the child who is chronically restless and has the inability to focus. A common misconception when these children's performances are discussed is in the interchangeable use of the terms "distractibility" and "has no attention span." These two terms describe two totally different children. As Mr. Lavoie explains:

"The Distractible child is the child who pays attention to everything.

The child with no attention span pays attention to nothing (most often because these children function at a lower cognitive level.)"

When we, parents and school personnel, understand the basis of these definitions in discussing a child's educational performance- we gain a greater understanding of the route that needs to be taken in educating the child and how the disability affects the child.

Also another condition that affects attention in children is "**selective attention**" which occurs in children who are bombarded the by stimuli around them and ultimately pick one stimuli to focus their attention on and that one item may have nothing to do with the conversation or task at hand.

Other conditions that affect children with learning disabilities are Disinhibition and

Impulsivity.

Disinhibition is a condition when the child displays inability to repress thought or actions that may be socially inappropriate. These children suffer from OTM- on the mind and out the mouth. They constantly say what they think and do not realize that it may not be polite or appropriate to say to people.

The learning disabled child with impulsivity acts without considering the natural consequences of their actions. Their brains work on the premise of "ready, fire, aim." Consequences have no part in their plan of thinking.

Dr. Lavoie has a very positive approach to be utilized in helping the child with social skills deficits learn in rather a hands on approach, it is what he terms as a "**social skill autopsy.**"

Dr. Lavoie's definition of a "social skill autopsy is the examination and inspection of a social error to discover the cause of the error, determine the damage and prevent it from occurring again.

According to Dr. Lavoie's approach: When a child commits a social skill error use it (a social skill autopsy) as a way to teach/ learn from the mistake instead of issuing punishment (when you only issue punishment the learning disabled child does not "learn" anything from the event only that they did something bad- but what that bad thing was they have no idea).

View social skills errors as an academic problem to be solved. You would use punishment if your child added two sums and got the wrong answer by sending that child to his/her room to think about what they did wrong; you would work with you child and break down the components of the addition problem in a step-by-step manner adding the numbers to get the right answer to the problem. A social autopsy takes place when you go over the situation with the child (including the events leading up to their "error") and at each step discuss / have your child tell you what they think was right or wrong along the way. Ask directed questions which will help the child "reason" the correct answer for each "step" and this will allow for them to see just where the social error occurred and learn from it. You would be surprised to learn just what your child may believe was the wrong action they committed. By asking directed questions of your child you can help your child "work through" each step and learn what the correct social response or skills were needed for that situation.

The Difference between the Standard Curriculum and the Hidden Curriculum

As a parent of any child we all are familiar with the term curriculum. Standard curriculum refers to academic subjects such

...Insight into a complex problem

as language arts (reading, writing, and literature), mathematics, science, history, etc.

But how many parents can actually say that they are familiar with or even heard of the term, "**Hidden curriculum**"? Very few, I can assure you. **So what is the school's Hidden curriculum and just how does it impact the child with learning disabilities?** Hidden curriculum is the unwritten, unspoken rules of school culture that makes that school different from another school.

Example: Attending high school you knew not to use a certain set of doors were the "tough" kids or a certain "clique" hung out if you were not part of that group.

The problem is that most learning disabled children have is that they not only violate the "hidden curriculum rules" but also they are not socially aware enough to realize that they have done that. It falls onto the parents to help their child recognize, learn and negotiate the hidden curriculum.

Examples of hidden curriculum parents may need to help their child learn:

*negotiating from one class to another - knowing how to physically move from English room 204 to the gym and then to science 102. Do not take for granted that your child can "figure" this out on his /her own.

*Help them understand what "cliques" are and what is "in" and "out."

*Who the building administrators are and who they can approach with problems or help for at school.

*How the administrative structure works- who they should first approach in requesting help or reporting a problem.

*How extra Curricular activities work at school-how they can use their interests to foster friendships and social skills. How long the activities will run, where they will meet etc.

*Understanding the school schedule:

Do they understand the school schedules when there are half days, delayed openings, early dismissals, or shortened class times?

Hidden curriculum is never more important than when a child is in adolescences.

As Dr. Levine once stated, "The definition of adolescent, the entire essences of adolescence, the entire purpose of being an adolescence is a 365 day, 52 week, 7 day a week battle to not be embarrassed".

Embarrassment is what a learning disabled child fears the most and they are constantly being embarrassed by their lack of understanding of the of hidden curriculum. They are constantly being put in the position of being embarrassed when they do not understand the hidden curriculum.

A study using mainstream teachers were once asked to list / recommend 7 skills needed a learning disabled child must learn to make it in a mainstream setting.

Their responses were:

1. Listening skills
2. Ability to follow directions
3. Stay on task
4. (Know) How to ask for or get help
5. Ability to get started (on work independently)
6. Finish tasks on time
7. Word attack skills.

The first 6 skills are hidden curriculum issues/skills.⁴

Parents must prepare the child for the situation and the situation for the child. If possible go over with the child/ take the child to the place and event or meeting is to take place. Explain, point out, and discuss with the child what he/she can or can't do there. Point out where the lavatory is, what will happen at the event, who will be there, etc.

On the other hand, the parent should also contact the person who will be in charge of /running the event and let them know about any special accommodations or circumstances your child have/need during the event. For warned is forearmed- it will make both your child and the person in charge more comfortable when the event actually occurs. The job of educating your child's teachers about your child's strengths and areas

of need falls upon the parent's shoulders. If your child had a medical condition/ issue (ex. allergic to peanuts) you would make sure you notified the teacher. Parents of a disabled child must view their child's disability in the same vein. Your child's disability affects him/her in the same manner in which another child's medical disability affects him/her. Regardless of the actual or degree of impairment that effects your child- you do not want to punish the child for something they can not control. Help them to learn to compensate for and learn to overcome their disability.

In understanding how or why your child is committing social skill errors Dr. Lavoie states:

"The solution is to look at the world through their eyes to find the understanding to provide the solution to the problem. Understand their interpretation of the situation, break down the reactions step by step, to help guide them to making the right solution."⁵

Parents who were not able to attend this workshop can rent this video; "Learning Disabilities and Social Skills with Rich Lavoie: "Last One Picked ...First One Picked On" from the South Brunswick Public Library. If you would like to receive a copy of the handout distributed at this workshop which discusses in of more detail the components and how to successfully complete a social autopsy with your child, please contact the SEPTA information line at (732) 651-7157 or email SRPTAAadvocate@aol.com

Lavoie Rick. "[Social Skills and the learning disabled child: Last one picked...first one picked on](#)"

Comments and quotes were taken from the video discussion and accompany booklet published by PBS.

The SEPTA of South River

81 Johnson Place
South River, New Jersey 08882
Information Line: (732) 651-7157
E-mail: info@specialeducationpta.org

NONPROFIT ORG

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 39

We're on the Web!

www.specialeducationpta.org

"Every Child is Born with Wings....
Make it a Choice to Educate and
Advocate for the Chances for
All Children to Learn to Soar"

*The SEPTA of South River was founded by a group of parents who
wished to promote the education and advocacy rights of the special needs
children of their community..*

By providing parents with the tools and effective advocacy skills

We endeavor to keep this goal a reality so that

***Every Child Will Fulfill Their Dreams
and Learn to Soar.***

Interested in
obtaining a copy of the

**SEPTA of
South River's**

S. E. Resource CD-Rom?

Contact SEPTA

At (732) 651-7157

Or Email us at:

info@specialeducationpta.org

Cost: \$7.50

(includes ship/handling fees)

Help Wanted:

**Would you like to help with
our newsletter, or Website?**

**Have you come across an in-
teresting book, article or Web-
site that deals with education,
special ed., or parenting that
you'd like to share with
others? Write a short
summary and we'll love to put
it in our newsletter and web
page.**

Upcoming Events:

November December January:

Nov. 3:

6:30 pm Parent Forum
7pm SEPTA general
meeting –open to public
So. River Public Library

Nov. 5:

Deadline for ordering
your tickets to the SEPTA
Holiday movie party-

“The Polar Express”

(see order form inside this newsletter)

Nov. 25-26:

Thanksgiving recess-
Schools Closed

Dec. 1

6:30 pm Parent Forum
7pm SEPTA general
meeting –open to public
So. River Public Library

Dec. 3:

7pm South River Tree
Lighting at Daley's Pond

Share the holiday spirit with
your community and don't for-
get to wait for the arrival of
Santa with the help of South
River's Fire Department

Dec. 18:

SEPTA Holiday Party
10:30 am Mega Movies, East
Brunswick “Polar Express”

Jan. 5:

6:30 pm Parent Forum
7pm SEPTA general
meeting –open to public
So. River Public Library

***Look for SEPTA's IEP
Guide mailing in the
beginning of January**

February:

Feb. 2:

6:30 pm Parent Forum
7pm SEPTA general
meeting– open to public
Topic: “Better IEPs”