

THE SOUTH RIVER ADVOCATE

Vol.5 Issue 4

The Newsletter of SEPTA of South River

Holiday 2003

www.specialeducationpta.org

info@specialeducationpta.org

Information Line (732) 651-7157

Coming Events:

Jan 12: Monroe Township Special Ed Parent Assoc.
Vaccination Seminar 7:30 Brookside School Library
Call Kathy (732)723-1838 for more info

Jan 14: New Jersey State Bar Foundation - Special Needs
Trusts Seminar

Jan 16 & 17: High School Drama Production 7 pm

Jan 19: Martin Luther King Day – Schools Closed

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

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

Jan 23 & 24: Elem. School Drama Production 7 pm

Feb 4: SEPTA Workshop *Learn how to Manage it All* South
River Public Library 6:30 pm

SEPTA receives award

SEPTA, for the second year in a row received the Great IDEA Award at the New Jersey State PTA convention. This Award, presented by the State PTA recognizes a Local PTA that actively advocates for special education programs and activities that promote sensitivity and respect of those with disabilities.

SEPTA received this award mainly for our efforts to educate and inform parents. We have tried to accomplish this through this Newsletter *The South River Advocate*, our Web site www.specialeducationpta.org, our continuing contributions to the Special Needs collection at the South River Public Library, and finally the workshops that we conduct throughout the year.

Special Ed Stats:

Number of in-district students	223
Number of Out-of- district students	42
Other	11
Total	276
Parental Attendance at meetings	70%

Reprinted from the December 22 Superintendent's report

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:

Tuesday, February 10

Thursday, March 11

Thursday, May 13

Our Thoughts and Prayers

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



Parental Involvement Campaign

The National PTA in partnership with the Advertising Council have launched a national public service advertising (PSA) campaign designed to encourage parents to become more involved in their children's school and education. The campaign, targets English and Spanish-speaking parents.

The English-language television PSA's are directed by actor/director James Woods and feature celebrities like basketball star Charles Barkley, model Kathy Ireland and actors Luke Perry, Anthony Edwards and Darryl Hannah.

The Spanish-language versions are directed by Marcello Paez and will feature singer Gloria Estafan

By Partnering with the Ad Council the National PTA was able to access almost \$39 Million worth of free production and air time.

East Brunswick Buddy Ball Baseball League Registration Dates:

The East Brunswick Buddy Ball Baseball League has offered another registration date for children with disabilities to register for the 2004 Buddy Ball Baseball League.

Open registration will be held on January 10, 2004 from 9am - 1pm at Manager's Hall on Dunham's Corner Rd. Practice starts in March/April on Wednesday or Thursday evenings and games are played on Saturdays till the end of June/beginning of July. Players are supplied with uniforms, hats, and practice shirts and upon the completion of the season an award ceremony is held where trophies are given out.

Players are assigned a "buddy" to whom he/she will help the player during practices and games. Players learn in a non competitive atmosphere with their peers.

All disabilities are welcome and accommodations are made so that all children can succeed.

Registration cost is \$30.00

For more information visit the EBBL website: www.ebbl.org

Improving Your Child's Performance on Tests

By Ronald Dietel

Teachers, parents, and schools have a common goal and shared responsibility to have children perform well on tests. Tests are, after all, the primary means on which students and schools are measured.

There's been plenty of advice on preparing for tests: Eat a good break fast, sleep well the night before, avoid careless mistakes, and answer easy questions first. Rather than focusing on these physical and strategic aspects of test taking, parents and students are better off knowing that success in test taking depends on good instruction, parent support, and hard work by students.

How parents can help

Here are some suggestions on what parents can do to help their children perform well on tests, especially in a high-stakes environment.

- Instill the value of learning in your child at an early age.
- Make sure your children are good readers.
- Communicate frequently with your child's teacher or teachers.
- Know your child's learning progress and needs by monitoring assignments, homework, and test performance.
- Establish a regular time for homework and studying.
- Don't make your child nervous about tests, even big ones.
- Encourage your child to develop a positive attitude toward school and testing.
- Review tests with your child after they are returned home for what your child did and didn't understand.
- Remember, tests and grading systems are not perfect.

Some test experts say that when their children were growing up, they emphasized the learning process. "I focused on helping my children find methods of studying and reviewing that worked for them," said Dan Koretz, a Harvard professor and testing researcher. "I pushed them (my children) to discern what level of studying generally produced a given grade, which was often more than they initially thought."

"Doing well on tests ultimately means knowing the test content," says Joan Herman, co-director of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing at UCLA and author of several books on evaluation and assessment. "Getting good at format and knowing

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

SEPTA would like to thank

Disability Services & Advocacy, LLC

www.dsausa.net

For sponsoring the mailing of our Newsletters

On the Book Shelf:

The South River Public Library recently added several new books on various disabilities or related topics to their collection:

- The Reading Teacher's Survival Kit: Ready-to-Use Checklists, Activities and Materials to Help All Students Become Successful Readers by W. Miller, Ed.D.
- Academic Success Strategies for Adolescents with Learning Disabilities and ADHD by E.Minskoff, Ph.D. & D. Allsopp, Ph.D.
- Home schooling the Child with ADD (or other special needs)Your Complete Guide to Successfully Home schooling the Child with Learning Differences by L. Colacion Hayes.
- The Vaccine Guide: Risks and Benefits for Children and Adults by R. Neustaedter OMD
- Talking With Your Hands & Listening With Your Eyes by G. Grayson, Ph.D.
- The Down Syndrome Nutrition Handbook by J. Guthrie Medlen R.D., L.D.

Next time you're in the area you might want to "check them out" and remember you can request books and other materials from area libraries to be interlibrary loaned for you.

"Interest is the seed from which knowledge takes root and blooms."

Scouting Programs for Children with Disabilities:

East Brunswick's Camp Daisy is once again offering Cub Scout, Boy Scout and Girl Scout programs for children with disabilities. Meetings are held once a month at Camp Daisy in Centennial Park off Riva Ave. The fee for the scouting program is \$25.00.

Families of children who wish to join these scouting programs must join the Daisy Association. Yearly membership for the Daisy Association is \$25.00 per family.

For more information on the scouting programs or any other program offered by Camp Daisy/ Daisy Association, please contact the East Brunswick Division of Recreation at (732) 390-6797.

Articles in Print:

An interesting article to take note off appeared in the September 3, 2003 Newsweek magazine; "Boys, Girls and Autism. Why 4 of 5 Autistic Children Are Males. What New Science Tells Us How Our Brains Work" By Geoffrey Cowley.

Working on the theory of a genders natural inclination towards empathy (female) and systemize (male) it looks to the premise that autism is an extreme of the "male" brain which functions on the high range of the systemizing scale. Though many causes of Autism are still not understood, "it has a strong genetic component and is marked by rapid brain growth during early childhood....autism has many faces ...a spectrum disorder in which affected people differ from the rest of us only by degrees."¹ The article goes on to sight the work of Cambridge University psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen and his thesis "The Essential Differences" which discuss the "E and S" way of thinking and can be considered a "mental style that people can learn to accommodate...Some time's it's even a gift."² This article is filled with interesting thought provoking concepts and resources for parents and sights programs that are noted for their outcomes. Take the time to find it and read it – it can really cause on to stop and think.

Fast ForWord

New Reading Software Holds Great Promise!!!

On December 3, 2003 Lisa McChallis, Director of Special Education and Cindy Calalillo, Reading Specialist and Teacher, introduced families to the new reading software program Fast ForWord at the South River Public Library. Students in Special Education in the Elementary school are piloting the new software this fall.

This new program was the result of a concerned parent's suggestion to investigate the program for her child and former Special Education Director Jon Marciante's exposure to the software along with the school district's strong desire to improve the reading skills of children in Special Education.

This exciting software created by Scientific Learning Corporation uses computer based games and listening tasks to help students with difficulty learning how to read the opportunity to practice skill sets that help to train the brain to think differently.

This learning process, based on years of neuroscience research, recognizes that the brain of a child with a learning disability is different that that of a child that does not have a disability. However, brain research over the last 50 years revealed that the "brain is not a rigid structure that scientists long thought, but a malleable, plastic organ that continually reorganizes itself." Scientists call the process neuroplasticity. This unique process enables stroke victims whose brain cells die the ability to relearn skill sets using different portions of their brain that are still alive.

Lisa and Cindy demonstrated how the software works. Each student has individually tailored program based on an initial assessment. Students practice on FastforWord for 30-40 minutes daily. Students have headsets and the software provides oral and visual instructions through the computer and students respond to the instructions. The tasks are fun and rewards based. According to Cindy and Lisa, many of our children enjoy the process thoroughly.

Although the program is only 1 1/2 months old, teachers are already seeing significant progress with a number of students. Lisa indicated that one of the nice features of the Fast ForWord program is the tracking statistics that monitor the progress of the child. If the child is not progressing at an adequate rate, exception reports go to the teacher and the software suggests alternative strategies to help the child progress.

Fast ForWord reports in their literature that "90 percent of the kids who complete the program made 1.5 to two years of progress in reading skills." While it is too early to tell if our students will see this type of result the initial findings are encouraging. While this is a relatively new program in New Jersey a number of school systems, such as, Tom' River have over 100 students working on the Fast ForWord program at any given time.

Lisa indicated that if the pilot proves successful the Administration plans on rolling out Fast ForWord for middle and high school students in addition to, students with English as a Second Language.

VSA Classes for Children With Autism or Autistic Behaviors:

VSA announces registration for spring Music/Movement, *Special Music Class and Art Classes for Children with Autism or Autistic Behaviors. Classes are held at a choice of four different sites:

- Rutgers University/Elks Lodge, New Brunswick
- Rowan University, Glassboro
- Forum School, Waldwick
- College of St. Elizabeth, Morristown

These classes are designed to enhance communication, social, cognitive and motor skills through the arts experience. Open to children ages 3-17 years old, these classes start the week of February 7th and end the week of April 10, 2004.

Registration deadline is January 15, 2004; please call VSA at (732) 745-3885

or (732)745-5935 for more information or to be put on their mailing list for future classes.

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Future SEPTA Events:

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.

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