



Do you want more information on:

- Getting your child screened for services?
- Finding an area specialist on learning disabilities?
- How to cope with your child's particular challenges?

Join us today!

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## Sensory Integration 101: What It Is And How It Works

Most everyone knows the five traditional senses – sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Did you know that there are other senses that work behind the scenes and are just as fundamental to our survival and functioning every day? They are called the proprioceptive and vestibular senses and they work closely with the body's central nervous system, helping us detect changes in our body's movement, sense of balance, and relationship to gravity.

Throughout the day, we are constantly receiving and processing information from each of these senses. Through the central nervous system, our brain takes in sensory information from both the external environment and the internal receptors within our body. It is constantly focusing, sorting, organizing, and interpreting this information so we can function successfully in everyday situations

– such as in the classroom, at home, at work, and in social interactions. This is known as sensory integration, or sensory processing. Sensory Integration is a normal, developmental process that is neurologically based.

The different senses and how they work are:

**Tactile** – the sense of touch; input is received from sensory receptors in the skin that tell us about touch, temperature, pain, and movement of the hairs on the skin.

**Vestibular** – the sense of movement; input is received from the inner ear about balance, gravitational changes, movement experiences and the body's position in space.

**Proprioceptive** – the sense of position; input is received from the body's muscles and joints, telling about body position,

weight, pressure, stretch, and movement.

**Auditory** – input relating to sounds; has to do with one's ability to correctly perceive, discriminate, process, and respond to sounds.

**Oral** – input relating to the mouth; has to do with one's ability to correctly perceive, discriminate, process, and respond to input within the mouth.

**Olfactory** – input relating to smell; has to do with one's ability to correctly perceive, discriminate, process, and respond to different odors.

**Visual** – input relating to sight; has to do with one's ability to correctly perceive, discriminate, process and respond to what one sees.

We use our sensory processing abilities to help us focus and attend (Continued on Page 5)

## Monica Andrews Guides Students with Learning Challenges

### Through the College Selection and Admissions Process

On April 14th Monica Andrews, Ed. D., met with high school students and area parents to discuss the challenges faced by students with learning disabilities when they attempt to navigate the college selection and admissions processes.

Dr. Andrews has visited hundreds of colleges across the country and interviewed thousands of faculty and students. Her mission: to put

together a comprehensive guide for parents and students about college selection and the admissions process for students with learning challenges. Her message to parents and students: students who understand their learning profiles and can articulate their needs are the ones whose college experiences have proven to be the most successful.

Ms. Andrews went on to say that

knowing the difference between high school and college and understanding the difference between support services and support programs are key elements to ensuring an appropriate college choice and successful college experience. Being a proactive self advocate who understands the different learning environments he/she is about to enter, versus the one

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## Lecture Grant Awarded to SpedPAC

The Groton SpedPAC is happy to announce that we have been awarded grant funds from the Groton Commissioners of Trust Funds Lecture Fund for the 2009-10 school year. This money allows the SpedPAC to bring high quality speakers to our District to address both parents and staff.

Next year, in addition to our regular workshops, we are focusing on topics indicated by parents to be of particular interest including: social competency; organizational skills; anxiety; and math & writing skills.

## SpedPAC Parent Questionnaire Results Are In!

In the fall, the SpedPAC distributed Parent Questionnaires to all parents with children on IEPs. Our goal was to learn more from parents of students with special needs and learning challenges and use the feedback to help us align our goals for the 2008-09 school year with the needs of the parents in the District. We asked parents about: Tell Us About You – Number of children on an IEP; where parent is in the Sped process; level of satisfaction; type of disability; special areas of interest and/or concern; SpedPAC Meetings – Parent preferences; additional meeting opportunities; SpedPAC Lectures & Workshops – Areas of interest; additional workshop opportunities; and SpedPAC Outreach – Success of current offerings and potential options for future. We were successful

in getting feedback and used some of this information to make decisions on lecture topics and support needs for this year. Additional information is helping us identify goals for the 2009/10 school year.

Highlights of Parents Feedback:

- Majority of parents are Satisfied or Highly Satisfied with their child's support services
- Top 3 areas of importance for parents were language-based learning disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder and math disabilities; followed closely by AD/HD and anxiety disorders
- SpedPAC added topics of interest to the 2008-09 Lecture Series as follows: Medication (Dec '08); Understanding Evaluations (Mar '09) Transition/College (Apr '09) and

Sensory Integration (May '09)

- Topics to be addressed in the 2009-10 Lecture Series include: Social Competency Skills; Organizational Skills; Anxiety Disorders; Inclusive Classroom Model & Differentiated Instruction; School-Parent Relationships; and Advocacy Skills
- SpedPAC will investigate student-oriented workshops for elementary, middle school and high school students in the areas of Organizational Skills, Self-Advocacy Skills, and Social Skills
- SpedPAC will consider developing a parent-to-parent network as a natural expansion of our current outreach programs for parents.
- Parents expressed an interest in discussion groups, a book group and parent socials.

## SpedPAC – Only As Effective As Its Volunteer Members

Over the past few years the SpedPAC has developed many outreach programs to support the needs of parents in the community including our Lecture Series, the Parent Resource Center, Parent Roundtables, our newsletter, website, and more. We're looking to our members to help us keep these great programs and support resources going next year. Come to our Annual Meeting on June 9th to learn more about our current programs and exciting goals for next year.

Volunteers are what will keep SpedPAC's outreach programs going. We value whatever time you can contribute to the effort. As an active member you have an opportunity to bring your ideas to reality and 'pass on' your knowledge, experience and passion to others. Many volunteer opportunities exist such as:

hosting a table at the Back-to-School nights, contributing to resource library and speaker/lecture selection, providing support to other parents, volunteering at the Parent Resource Center, and copying. We look forward to any contribution you can make to help keep our programs running.

### SpedPAC Goals for 2009/10 School Year:

#### Raise Disability Awareness

Look for ways to educate the child, peer group, teachers and the community as a whole on learning, social/emotional, behavioral and physical differences.

#### Explore Student Workshops

Look for ways to offer students 'skills workshops' in the areas of organization, social and self-advocacy.

#### Develop Parent-to-Parent Network

Look to develop a 'mentor' program for parents new to the special education process.

#### Review District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (DCAP)

Look to review the current DCAP with the Director of Curriculum.

DCAP exists to meet student needs in the general education classroom, providing guidance to teachers on accommodating a wide range of student learning styles and needs, laying the foundation for student support and parent/school communication, trust and collaboration.

#### Expand Education Resource Libraries

Look to apply for grant funding to add to the staff reference libraries at each school. Topics to include: college search; developing self-advocacy and organizational skills.

# Monica Andrews Guides Students with Learning Challenges

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they just graduated from, helps ensure a successful transition. At the college level, the support of family and faculty that the student enjoyed in high school is no longer readily available, nor is it ensured by an IEP. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits colleges from discrimination of students with learning challenges, but is not required by law to provide services. It is therefore important that the student produce and provide the required documentation so that they can receive necessary accommodations such as extended time, quiet rooms, note takers or scribes, and the use of a computer.

Many colleges provide support services and support programs. Support services can include tutoring services available to all students and are provided by professionals or peers. Comprehensive

Support Programs provide the student with a professional tutor/academic advisor whom they meet with on a regular basis. The tutor can assist the student with academics and additional aspects of college life. When looking at potential schools, students should research all types of colleges with a variety of support services and programs. When a student visits a college it is important to ask about academic accommodations and support, and to ask how the support is obtained and/or offered. If possible, they should visit the academic support facility and meet with the academic support director. Providing appropriate documentation of their disability, which includes current diagnostic testing (within three years), high school IEP, and their learning profile, can assist the director in identifying and recommending available services.

Ensuring students understand their

learning profile, strengths, and weaknesses not only prepares them for college life, but is key to a successful college experience. With this knowledge a student is better able to choose a college that matches their strengths, passions, and personality. Teaching students the skill of self advocacy will help ensure academic success and is a skill that will benefit them in any endeavor. Visiting colleges, researching the academic support programs, meeting faculty and students, are all important steps to selecting the most appropriate college for any student.

For more information about Monica Andrews, visit her website [www.reelwisdom.com](http://www.reelwisdom.com). Monica Andrews' DVD, College Success for Students with Learning Challenges is available at the Parent Resource Center located in the Prescott School.



**Monica Andrews, Ed. D., helps students and their parents navigate the college admissions process.**

## Extended School Year Services for GDRSD

The Groton-Dunstable Regional School District will offer Extended School Year services for eligible children this summer from July 6th to 23rd & August 1st to 13th.

An extended school year (ESY) program may be identified for a student if the student has demonstrated or is likely to demonstrate substantial regression in his or her learning skills and/or substantial difficulty in relearning such skills if an extended program is not provided. All students with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). In order for some students to receive FAPE, services will need to

be provided beyond the typical school year.

To determine a student's eligibility for an ESY teams collect data regarding the student's skill levels before and after a vacation period. The Team reviews the data to determine whether the student demonstrates regression or difficulty with recoupment of skills. ESY services are provided to protect against regression and to assist in recoupment of those skills already being addressed on the IEP. Regression and recoupment consist of inter-related elements including: the loss of performance levels that were attained before a

break in service, the child's limited learning rate, which lengthens the amount of time the child requires to review and/or relearn previously attained objectives, and the time for that child to accomplish such recoupment is greater than the period of time the school district allows all other children for review and/or relearning.

Parents of eligible students will be notified by mail in May of their child's Extended School Year schedule and location.

Cam Huston, PPS Director



## Co-Teaching Models at G DMS



Co-Teaching can take on many different forms.

"The essence of teaching is to make learning contagious, to have one idea spark another."

Marva Collins  
(1936 - )

On April 30th, Middle School Principal, Steve Silverman, and his senior staff presented a primer on co-teaching models and the status of their implementation at the Middle School. Co-teaching on the team level was introduced at the Middle School last year and continues for all grades in mathematics and for ELA on the seventh and eighth grade level. Co-taught classes for ELA on the fifth and sixth grade level will be initiated next year.

Given the confusion that some have had understanding the differences between two teaching approaches that have been much discussed in the District lately, Mr. Silverman set forth to demystify the distinctions between Differentiated Instruction and Co-Teaching. The distinction between the two can best be summarized as follows:

Differentiated instruction is an approach that is being implemented in all classrooms - standard and co-taught settings alike. This methodology involves assessing students' knowledge prior to presenting a given topic and then dividing the class into subsections according to their

level of comprehension of the material prior to presentation. In this way, those with a minimal understanding of the topic can be instructed towards the benchmarks while those well on the way to mastering the material can be involved in activities which will enrich their knowledge, complementing that which they have already demonstrated they know. The groups created during differentiated instruction would likely vary some from topic to topic depending on an individual student's strengths.

Co-teaching, on the other hand involves team teaching within a single classroom. Co-taught classrooms have two teachers - one general education and one special education. While the special education teacher is there primarily to address the diverse learning needs of the special education subpopulation, she is a full team member and may in fact lead the entire class for a given lesson. Just as it is in the other classrooms, differentiated instruction is also taking place. In this circumstance, though, there may be additional accommodations being made for specific learning disabilities

and students requiring organizational support on top of dividing the class based on comprehension of a given topic. These accommodations may be made across all differentiated activities, depending on where the needs of the special education subpopulation lie.

Mr. Silverman then went on to describe in detail the five different types of co-teaching: Lead and Support, Station Teaching, Parallel Teaching, Alternative Teaching, and Team Teaching. The exact approach that the co-taught class would adopt could vary from unit to unit depending on the needs of the students.

Middle School administrators understand that the key to success for co-taught classrooms, particularly early on in their implementation, will be prioritizing common planning time for the team teachers. Ideally, this would take place for 60 minutes each day, although this is often difficult to achieve.

To learn more about Co-Teaching at the Middle School and the differences between the various Co-Teaching models, please visit our website where a link to Mr. Silverman's presentation is posted at the bottom of the main page.

## A Primer on the Assessment of Learning Differences

Joan Axelrod, a psychoeducational diagnostician in private practice in Lexington, MA, gave an enlightening presentation on March 3rd to a standing room only crowd on the kinds of tests commonly used for the assessment of learning differences. She also engaged in an in depth discussion as to how test scores are interpreted and how testing can (and cannot) inform instruction. The lecture was well attended not only by parents who wished to better understand those evaluations used to determine whether or not a child may

receive special education services and their consequent progress, but also by many District staff who also wished to better understand this incredibly complex topic.

Ms. Axelrod discussed the pros and cons of commonly used assessments and went on to indicate her support for the more proactive new assessment models which have recently come into common practice (e.g., RTI or Response to Intervention and DIBELS - Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy).

Copies of both of Ms. Axelrod's slides (Assessment of Learning Differences and a detailed analysis of the Wechsler Intelligence Scales for Children, 4th edition, aka WISC-IV) can be found in the Previous Presentations and Newsletter Archives portion of our website, [www.gdspedpac.org](http://www.gdspedpac.org).

For those wishing to learn more about this topic, please consider perusing a recent addition to our Resource Library, *Straight Talk about Psychological Testing for Kids* by MGH neuropsychologists Ellen Braaten and Gretchen Felopoulos.

# Sensory Integration 101: What It Is And How It Works

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so we can learn, to help us regulate our energy levels, behaviors and emotions, when developing and using motor skills, and during social interactions. When it works smoothly, we are able to respond to experiences and to our environment appropriately.

When the sensory integration process is disordered or not working properly, a number of problems in learning, motor skill development, behavior, or emotional regulation might be observed. For instance, you might notice that your child is easily distracted or impulsive. They may have an unusually high or unusually low activity level, may withdraw or shut down easily, may react negatively to loud music or bright lights, may have a strong aversion to certain textures or smells, may seem clumsy or uncoordinated, may have delays in academic achievement, may have difficulties with fine motor activities such as handwriting, may seek out intense sensory experiences, may appear lazy or unmotivated, or they may melt down over seemingly trivial matters. Please note that all children may encounter difficulties in any of these behaviors at some time in their lives. It is when the frequency and intensity

of these difficulties are so severe that they impact their functioning in every day life, that interventions are needed.

It is believed that Sensory Processing Disorder currently affects one in twenty children and that many childhood disorders, such as ADD/ADHD, Anxiety, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Bi-Polar Disorder, Autism Spectrum Disorders, various learning disabilities, and many other mental health disorders have an underlying sensory component to them.

On Wednesday, May 13th, Lisa Hamilton-Goscombe, a local physical therapist and the owner of Groton Integrated Therapies, presented a Sensory Processing Overview in the Middle School North library to parents, staff, and community members. At this informative lecture, Ms. Hamilton-Goscombe reviewed the different aspects of sensory processing, including:

- Sensory modulation – one's ability to take in sensory information, decide what is relevant, and make an appropriate behavior response. Difficulties in this area can result in avoidance or fear of normal sensations or unusual sensory-seeking

behaviors.

- Sensory discrimination – one's ability to organize and interpret specific qualities of sensory information such as size, shape, and texture; direction of a noise; and body position and movement in space. Difficulties in this area generally result in motor related challenges - such as poor balance and coordination or delayed motor skill development.
- Motor planning issues or praxis – which is the ability to plan, sequence, and execute novel activities. Effective praxis is impacted by ones difficulties with sensory modulation and sensory discrimination. Children and adolescents with dyspraxia often have difficulty executing motor tasks, developing organizational skills, and interacting with objects in a playful and imaginative way.

Ms. Hamilton-Goscombe also went over red flags that might indicate potential issues with sensory processing and the typical behaviors and functional difficulties that one might observe or experience when a child or adolescent has poor sensory processing. A copy of Ms. Hamilton-Goscombe's presentation can be found on our website.



"It is not so important to know everything as to appreciate what we learn."  
- Hannah More  
(1745 - 1833)

## Summer Planning with the FCSN's 2009 Camp Guide

Summer will soon be upon us once again. For those of us who have children with special needs, it can be quite the challenge to find appropriate summer camps and activities. Each year, the Federation for Children with Special Needs compiles a guide to help parents navigate their choices. The Federation suggests the following:

1. Determine your child's needs

- What would your child enjoy?
- What skills is he working on?
- Does your child have difficulty with new or unfamiliar situations?

2. Explore your options

- Local park and community-center

recreation programs.

- Day camps.
- Activity programs and workshops.
- Expanded after-school programs (e.g, the PTYC summer program)
- Overnight camps.

3. Keep in mind that it's against the law for a provider to tell you that your child cannot be admitted to a program because of his disability.

Also remember that many options and ideas are available for making a situation work. For example, if your child needs one-on-one assistance at a camp but the camp cannot provide this, your insurance company or state

department that oversees the welfare of children with disabilities may be able to help pay for an extra teacher, aide, or counselor.

Finally, for those situations where full inclusion simply is not a viable option, the guide presents a compilation of special needs camps in the region where you can be assured that your child's specific challenges will be accommodated.

FCSN's Summer Fun 2009 is available directly from their website at [www.fcsn.org/summercamps](http://www.fcsn.org/summercamps) for a nominal fee. A print copy is also available for review at the Parent Resource Center at Prescott.



You can find a print copy of FCSN's guide at the PRC or online at [www.fcsn.org](http://www.fcsn.org).

Groton - Dunstable  
**SPEDPAC**



A coalition of  
special and regular  
education parents  
for the support and  
betterment of all.

Welcome to the newsletter of the Groton-Dunstable  
SpedPAC. Love it? Hate it? Please let us know at  
[newsletter@gdspedpac.org](mailto:newsletter@gdspedpac.org).

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Summer Hours for the  
Parent Resource Center  
at Prescott will be by  
appointment only for access  
to the Resource Library,  
online resources, and  
SpedPAC personnel.  
Please contact one of the  
officers by email or call  
978-448-5505 ext. 229.

We're on the web at  
[www.gdspedpac.org](http://www.gdspedpac.org)

## SpedPAC Annual Meeting

Tuesday, June 9th at 7:00pm

Groton-Dunstable High School Library

A little business... the year in review... a look to the  
future... elections... refreshments... and time to socialize!