

Groton - Dunstable
SPEDPAC



Of Cabbages and Kings

The Newsletter of the Groton-Dunstable
Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Volume 2, Issue 3

Spring 2008

Do you want
more informa-
tion 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!

SpEdPAC Liaisons
for District Schools

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Florence Roche
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Prescott
Lisa McLaughlin

Swallow Union
Mary Slattery

Middle School
Sarah Campbell
SpEdPAC Vice Pres.

High School
Maryanne Squeglia
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Stephen Shore Provides Inspiration at Black Box

On Thursday, May 8th, Dr. Stephen Shore, Ed. D., challenged concerned parents, District staff, and even those affected by autism themselves to reframe how they think about autism and clear pathways towards success.

Dr. Shore interspersed the personal narrative of his own journey up the autism spectrum and towards a fulfilling life with a history of and the current thinking on autism spectrum disorders. He also discussed the "autism tsunami" lurking on our horizon, when the exponentially growing wave of children affected by ASD starts turning 22 (the age at which government mandated support for individuals receiving special education ends).

Far from being an alarmist, Dr. Shore tried to elucidate the concept of "twice exceptionality" which is quite common among those with high functioning autism. Twice exceptionality is when ex-

treme talents coexist with extreme challenges, whether they be cognitive, emotional, or physical in nature. What high functioning autistics and those with Asperger's Syndrome need to learn is how to work around their challenges in a "typical" environment.

In the work environment, Stephen had very specific advice for those with ASD. First, whenever they enter a new work environment, he urged them to scan it immediately for situations that would prove problematic for them physically or otherwise. Then, he advised communicating to co-workers how these challenges might affect them (although he didn't support full disclosure of ASD status unless it was necessary). Finally, if accommodations could not be obtained without it, he supported full disclosure of an individual's sensory integration and autism issues to help gain a better understanding in the

workplace.

In addition, he presented a review of some promising interventions for those on the autism spectrum. He didn't espouse any particular approach, but encouraged investigating several for a given individual in an effort to find the best fit for their particular "brand" of autism.

As a final point, Dr. Shore discussed the "hidden curriculum" required for all those afflicted with autism to successfully integrate with society at large. People on the autism spectrum need to be explicitly taught what most of us learn innately regarding social interactions with others. The teaching of social pragmatics is of primary importance when it comes to promoting the success of those with ASD.

A copy of Dr. Shore's presentation can be found on the SpEdPAC's website at www.gdspedpac.org/StephenShore.pdf.

Transition Update for Children on Plans

This week, both Florence Roche and Swallow Union invited the parents of transitioning elementary students receiving special education services to roundtable orientations at their child's prospective school. The Florence Roche roundtable took place on Wednesday, May 21, while prospective parents met the special education staff and administrators at Swallow Union on Friday, May 23. Parents were individually notified about the meetings to ensure privacy.

In addition to these meetings, Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) will be making arrangements for all children on plans to visit their prospective school prior to the general orientation on June 10th so that special education staff and administrators can meet them and also so that they can tour the building in a smaller group.

PPS director, Cam Huston, has assured that there will be individual transition meetings for each af-

fected elementary student on a plan. This is standard operating procedure whenever special education students change schools and will be adhered to despite the unusual circumstances. Parents of children on plans should be notified by their current IEP Team Chair as to when their individual transition meetings will take place. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your Special Education Liaison, the PPS office, or SpEdPAC representative.



"Education is not
the filling of a pail,
but the lighting
of a fire."

William Butler Yeats

GDRSD's philosophy
is to support inclu-
sion to the maximum
extent possible.



Successful Spring Roundtables at MS and HS

This Spring, SpedPAC, in conjunction with special education staff and school administrators, hosted roundtable meetings with parents at both the middle school and high school.

Christopher Jones, Assistant Principal and Team Chair at the High School, presented parents and staff of high school students and incoming 8th graders with a presentation about the special education program at the High School. Mr. Jones explained the functions of the Learning Center, which is for students with specific learning disabilities (SLDs) and the Alternative Learning Center which services students with behavioral and emotional issues. Other topics discussed included communication protocol, inclu-

sion, and learning programs, such as Skills Tutor. The staff's goals for next year include increased staff training and a better understanding of executive functioning skills.

The Middle School roundtable was an informal meeting of staff and parents led by Steve Silverman, Principal of the Middle School. Due to the burgeoning population of students on the autism spectrum in GDRSD, discussion centered around the critical need for an in-house program to offer appropriate and needed services for those students.

Another topic that was discussed at both the High School and Middle School roundtables was school transition. The staff at the

Middle School have taken a proactive approach with incoming special education students that includes comprehensive transition meetings with appropriate administrators and special education staff from both the entering and exiting schools in attendance. The High School and Middle School team chairs have made a concerted effort in collaborating and coordinating the services and programs required for each special education student. This collaboration was evident by the attendance of Mr. Jones at the Middle School roundtable, and of Ms. Lynn Jarvis, Team Chair at the Middle School, at the High School roundtable. By working together Mr. Jones and Ms. Jarvis look to streamline the transitions process between the two schools.

Helpful Online Resources for the Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities

With so many changes going on in the school district and parents being uncertain where to turn for answers regarding specific learning disabilities, SpedPAC would like to provide a listing of particularly helpful websites.

Schwab Learning

Founded by the Charles and Helen Schwab Foundation, Schwab Learning is now being hosted by GreatSchools. Schwab Learning continues to serve families by providing information, guidance, and support that address the emotional, social, practical, and academic needs and concerns of kids with learning and attention difficulties — and their parents. SchwabLearning.org is a free website designed specifically for parents of kids in kindergarten through high school with learning difficulties. SchwabLearning.org enables parents to understand and manage their children's difficulties with learning

and attention, and influence changes necessary for success.

Started by Schwab Learning and now being hosted by the Professor Garfield Foundation, SparkTop.org, is a free website created expressly for kids ages 8-12 with learning disabilities. By providing information and peer support to kids in a safe and interactive environment, SparkTop.org is designed to help them gain confidence and insight about their challenges and strengths.

LD Online

LDOnline.org seeks to help children and adults reach their full potential by providing accurate and up-to-date information and advice about learning disabilities and ADHD. The website features hundreds of helpful articles, multimedia, monthly columns by noted experts, first person essays, children's writing and artwork, a comprehensive resource guide, very active forums, and a Yellow Pages

referral directory of professionals, schools, and products.

LD Podcast

LDPodcast.com is a free weekly podcast/internet radio show about learning and learning disabilities. Their focus is to bring topics and guests on the show to discuss parenting children who are struggling in school. Topics include: dyslexia; ADHD; central auditory processing disorder; Asperger's and autism spectrum disorders; strategies to help your child succeed in school; special education; therapy and therapists; gifted children with learning disabilities; understanding how your child learns best and how you can help; latest research. Past guests include: Rick Lavoie, Robert Brooks, Jonathan Mooney, Anne Ford & John Richard Thomas, Peter Wright, Thomas Brown, Alfie Kohn, and Dr. Perri Klass. The shows can be downloaded to a computer, iPod or mp3 player.

Cynthia R. Haddad, CFP, E mpowers Parents to Plan for their Kids

Regardless of the state of the economy or one's ability to balance a checkbook, long term financial planning is a daunting task and, with a special needs child, the issues become more complicated and emotionally charged. In March, Certified Financial Planner Cynthia Haddad sat down with a group of parents and grandparents and gave them confidence and a game plan for getting started on planning for their families' future.

Using the book she co-authored with John Nadworthy, *The Special Needs Planning Guide: How to Prepare for Every Stage of Your Child's Life* (Brookes Publishing Co., April 2007), Ms. Haddad outlined the various factors that need to be considered as families begin to plan, including the level of family support required, the role of government and educational services, sibling issues, financial considerations, legal issues, and overcoming emotional hurdles to get the job of planning done.

There is no single template for creating a financial plan, but creating a Letter of Intent is the single best tool a family can have to create a sustainable environment for their adult child. A Letter of Intent is like a map of a family's life, containing all contact information for

medical and service providers, account numbers, where to find legal and insurance documents, daily routines, vacation habits, work schedules, even likes and dislikes. Simply put, it's like a massive note to the babysitter. Haddad's *Planning Guide* contains a working template (and even has a disc so it can be downloaded onto a computer) which outlines the major components of a letter of intent. Drafting a Letter of Intent is a good way to identify those issues that require further discussion and consultation (and to save on the fees you pay for such services, which are often by the hour), which often revolve around interaction with social services agencies and end of life issues.

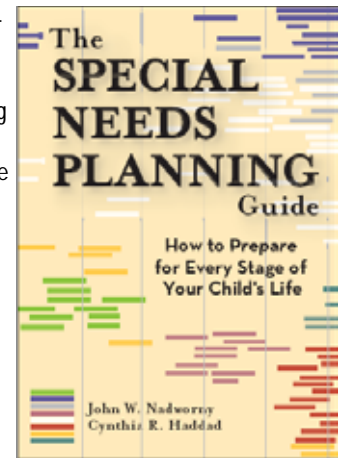
During the school-age years, many parents – in conjunction with their school district - act as the sole support for their child in terms of managing day to day life with little or no contact with state agencies. At age 22, however, state mandated support for special education students ends and so it is vital that the planning process begin at about age 15 to assure that, should the need arise, government supports can be accessed (even if it is only in an emergency). In particular, vocational and community support training can be a key link

to creating meaningful employment options for people with disabilities, and the school can act as a conduit for establishing the ties that will assist families in creating as independent a life as possible for their child. When a child turns 15, all of these long-term issues and goals should be presented to the special education team and outlined in the parent's vision statement for the child.

Ms. Haddad spoke at length about the need for good counsel from attorneys well versed in special education law and planning. Many families choose to create a special needs trust, which is typically funded by life insurance at the time of the death of the second parent. Setting up the trust, deciding how to fund it, and who should administer it should be done in consultation with attorneys and financial planners. Determining who will have control of the finances and day to day issues (and whether that is one person, two, or a team) are also decisions that benefit from professional consultation.

Many parents had questions about how to balance financial planning for their child with a disability with

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·By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail"

Benjamin

Franklin

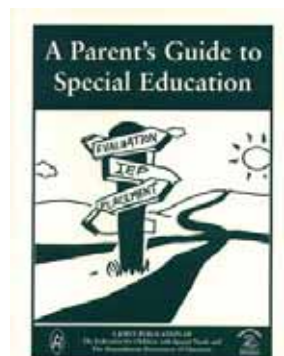
SpedPAC Hosts IEP Workshop by FCSN

On Tuesday, April 8, the Groton-Dunstable SpedPAC hosted its annual IEP (Individual Education Plan) workshop. Ms. Sandra Osborne from The Federation for Children with Special Needs spoke on this important topic. Every child with a disability who receives special education services must have an Individual Education Plan. Ms. Osborne took parents step-by-step through the development process for the

IEP, including how to articulate a Vision and appropriate time-lines. She also discussed how an IEP Team should use evaluations to write measurable goals and objectives and how teachers and staff should measure a student's progress throughout the school year. Many attendees' questions centered around the Service Delivery grid and how to interpret the way in which services are posted on it. Ms.

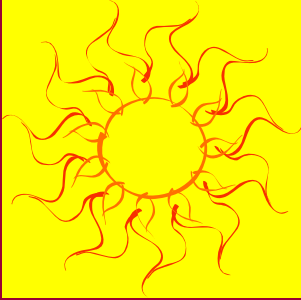
Osborne presented a very beneficial and informative workshop and her efforts were much appreciated by all those who attended.

If you were unable to attend the workshop, but would like to see some of the important materials presented, please visit <http://www.fcsn.org/parentguide/parentguide.pdf>. This document has a detailed section on IEP development.



Available at www.fcsn.org

Transition Advice from Elementary Guidance Staff



2008 GDRSD Summer Services

This year, Summer Services will take place at the Boutwell School Mondays through Thursdays, starting the week of July 7th. There will be a break in summer programming for the week of July 28th and then services will resume until the end of the week of August 11th. If your child is eligible for summer services, you should have been notified this month by PPS as to when and where these services will take place. All children on IEPs should have their eligibility status stated in their IEP under Schedule Modification.

Patricia Ascione

Transition and change are a part of our daily lives, but are particularly emphasized as we approach the end of another school year. For parents of children with special needs, times of transition can be especially challenging for both child and parent. A change as seemingly simple as wearing short sleeves instead of long sleeves can be upsetting and a source of conflict for children with sensory integration difficulties. If your child has difficulty making friends, you may worry about whether your child's friends will be in his/her class next year, and if so, will the friendship carry over into a new school year? To help promote a positive transition from one school year to the next, whether you are changing grades, schools, or towns, the GDRSD Elementary School Counselors offer the following month-by-month suggestions:

June

- Be available to talk with your child about any transition concerns that may surface. Validate, rather than minimize, your child's feelings (e.g., "I bet many children wonder about that."). Remember that children often reflect the feelings of the adults around them. If you are positive about change, then your child is more likely to be positive as well. If you have specific concerns about your child, consult with his/her teacher, school counselor, pediatrician, etc. to help alleviate any problems or lingering doubts. Keep in mind that it is possible to talk too much about the transition. Try to follow your child's lead regarding how much conversation/support he/she needs during the end of the school year. For children who don't typically express their feelings verbally, provide access to other means of expression.

Heather Ballou

For example, put out paper, markers, clay, and paint for your young artist, or provide opportunities for bicycle riding, hiking, or bug collecting for your outdoor enthusiast.

- Participate in transition activities sponsored by your school (e.g., "Move Up Day"). Often anxiety is caused by the unknown, so utilize your resources (school staff; friends; families with older students) to learn about your child's upcoming grade and/or new school. Besides learning who his/her new teacher and classmates will be, your child might like to hear about special activities or field trips planned for his/her grade next year. You may want to find out about topics your child will study and plan summer reading/trips to tie in with those themes.
- Provide your child with an autograph book or disposable camera to use at the end of the school year (e.g., field day; last day of school) to serve as remembrances from the year. Check with your child's teacher in advance regarding school policy about photographs.
- Sign up for summer sports teams or activities that include children from throughout Groton and Dunstable so that your child may have an opportunity to meet children from his/her grade/school.

July

- Visit the library or local playground to provide your child with opportunities to practice meeting new children. Although the friendships may only last as long as your outing, children who are shy or have social skill deficits, benefit from repeated practice introducing themselves, play-

Maureen Cahill

ing, and conversing with similar aged peers.

- Schedule play dates with children who will be in the same school as your child in the fall. If you are changing schools or moving up to another school, familiar faces will help your child feel more comfortable in his/her new environment.

August

- Many children with special needs have difficulties transitioning from summer to the new school year. Taking small steps as you move from one season to the next, rather than a giant leap, usually helps the transition go smoothly. Begin a few weeks prior to the start of school by enlisting your child's help in purchasing and preparing school supplies. Children usually enjoy their new school items, and by giving your child some choice in what is purchased, you also give him/her a sense of control over the upcoming changes. In addition to shopping for new backpacks and shoes, you and your child can also plan snacks/lunches for the new school year, practice driving the bus route, and set up a study space for homework completion.
- Gradually change your routines at home to shift from a summer schedule to a school year schedule. For example, if your child's bedtime is an hour later during the summer months, then decrease bedtime by 15 minutes every other day over the course of a week. Slowly add more structure/routine to your days as you near the end of summer vacation. For example, establish set lunch or dinner times; plan a scheduled activity each morning rather than unstructured play, or begin waking your child up in the morning if he/she has become accustomed to sleeping late.

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Cynthia R. Haddad, CFP, E mpowers Parents to Plan for their Kids

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 concerns for funding the higher education of their typical children. Ms. Haddad indicated that there are a number of factors involved, including whether families intend to depend on any state funding for their child. There is no simple way to set cash aside for a disabled child without that money being considered when a family applies for financial aid for siblings – this is why many families use the special needs trust funded by insurance because the money only materializes at the point when the

child needs it. She also noted that some 529 savings plans are not designed to address the academic needs of special education students and families should be cautious before opening one for students who may not be college bound.

Ms. Haddad also shared her own story and some of the situations she faces in helping to plan and care for her disabled brother, highlighting the uniqueness of each family but also the universal challenges people face as parents and children grow older, regardless of disability. She reassured parents

that there are many options for families and that the most important part of the planning process is getting it started (the Letter of Intent) and being willing to revise the plans every few years so that the needs of the entire family are addressed as time goes on.

In addition to the Haddad-Nadworthy book, parents are also advised to consult a guide by Belmont Attorney Barbara Jackins, *Legal Planning for Special Needs in Massachusetts: A Family Guide to SSI, Guardianship, and Estate Planning* (Adibooks.com, January 2006).

“Change does not necessarily assure progress, but progress implacably requires change. Education is essential to change, for education creates both new wants and the ability to satisfy them.”

Henry Steele Commager

Transition Advice from Guidance Staff

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- Celebrate the start of the new school year. Setting a positive tone will help your child start the school year with optimism. Make a bus shaped cake to share with your family after the first day, join neighbors at the bus stop for a bagel and juice breakfast al fresco, or gather with friends at a playground or your house to share stories from the first day.

September

- Expect behavior changes as your move from the summer routine to the new school year. Your child’s behavior should improve as new routines are established and your child becomes familiar with his/her new teacher/classroom.
- Become an active member in your school community. Volunteer to help in the library or your child’s classroom. Attend Open House nights and Parent-Teacher

conferences. Sign up for a PTA event/committee or volunteer to chaperone a field trip. Introduce yourself to new people.

October

- If after the first 6-8 weeks of school your child seems to be having difficulty contact your IEP liaison.

We wish you a happy and safe summer vacation and look forward to hearing about your adventures in the fall.

New Notice of Procedural Safeguards Published

Last month, the Massachusetts Department of Education (MA DOE) sent out to all school districts the new, updated “Parent’s Notice of Procedural Safeguards”. Parents may pick up a copy at Tarbell in the Pupil Personnel Services Department or can go to: www.doe.mass.edu/sped/prb/,

click on either the Adobe or Microsoft Word icon next to “Parent’s Notice of Procedural Safeguards”, and print out a copy for reference.

The District’s Pupil Personnel Services Department usually sends out a copy to each parent who has a child on an IEP at the

beginning of every school year in either August or September. At present, the new version is being sent out with all of the other paperwork for initial evaluations and IEPs. Please call the Pupil Personnel Services Department at Tarbell if you have any questions at (978)448-5505, x211.



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.

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Melissa Sweeny, secretary -

msweeny@gdspedpac.org

"The time has come," the Walrus said,

To talk of many things:

Of shoes - and ships - and sealing wax -

Of cabbages - and kings -

And why the sea is boiling hot -

And whether pigs have wings."

Through the Looking Glass

Lewis Carroll

We're on the web at
www.gdspedpac.org

Upcoming SpedPAC Events

DATE	PROGRAM	LOCATION	TIME
5/20/08 Tuesday	Basic Rights Workshop	High School Library	7:00 PM
5/21/08 Wednesday	Groton-Dunstable SpedPAC Annual Presentation GDRSD School Committee Meeting	High School Library	7:00 PM
6/17/08 Tuesday	Groton-Dunstable SpedPAC Annual Business Meeting and	High School Library	7:00-9:00 PM