

Groton - Dunstable  
SPEDPAC



# Of Cabbages and Kings

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

Volume 3, Issue 1

Fall 2008

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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## Joan Celebi Shows Parents of Special Needs Children How to Be "Overwhelmed No More!"

On Tuesday evening, October 21, Ms. Joan Celebi, a certified life coach and mother of two children, one of whom has special needs, visited Groton and delivered a thought-provoking lecture for parents of special needs children on strategies for a more balanced life. Many parents in today's hectic world – *whether they have a special needs child or not* - become overwhelmed with the myriad of activities, parenting demands and deadlines that they are faced with, finding themselves trying to successfully juggle their roles and responsibilities. Ms. Celebi gave some great tips and strategies for creating a more manageable and balanced life.

Ms. Celebi began by asking parents some key questions: What was most important to them in life? As parents of special needs children, what was their role/responsibility? When life gets hectic, how does one



Joan Celebi,  
author of  
Overwhelmed  
No More!

create a balanced life? What would 'balance' and 'harmony' look like in their lives if it existed? She proposed several 'essentials' to a balanced life: taking care of yourself; stretching one's mind and body; making time for fun; simplifying; throwing perfection out the window; and taking stock of what matters to you most. The question from attendees to her was, "How do I actually do that?" Ms. Celebi recommended that parents create an 'action plan' that is highly doable and easily measured, nothing complicated or out of reach. Things she suggested to be included:

- Taking small moments for the

things that are important to you

- Surrounding yourself with people who understand and support you
- Choosing one thing you could delegate (i.e. a chore to be done around the house or an errand)
- Pursuing an intellectual, creative or personal hobby by signing up for a community class/course
- Fitting in a basic fitness activity twice a week
- Taking notice of the 'micro-moments' of joy in your day or week

Her message was a well-received and an invaluable one. For those parents who would like to learn more about Ms. Celebi, her free monthly newsletter and/or information on her most requested articles on balanced living, please visit: [www.specialneedsparentcoach.com](http://www.specialneedsparentcoach.com).

## Essential Facilitation for IEP Meetings (FIEP)

On November 13th, Ginger Sewell of SpectrumK12 School Solutions in Atlanta, GA, presented to parents and staff an overview of the process and techniques of facilitation. In the facilitative IEP meeting model, an IEP is developed by a collaborative team whose members share responsibility for both the process and results of the meeting. The decision-making is managed through building and improving relationships; reaching true consensus;

focusing the content/process on student needs; and exercising an efficient, guided meeting process where effective communication and reflective listening are practiced. Using an interaction method (see figure), the IEP team ends up having a shared responsibility to develop the appropriate IEP for the student.

Ms. Sewell demonstrated visuals used in FIEP meetings by displaying a pre-determined AGENDA and a

chart of expected OUTCOMES for everyone in the room to refer to. An additional listing of meeting GROUND RULES is often used to remind meeting participants of meeting norms and honoring time limits and opinions of others. The FIEP meeting model emphasizes three dimensions of success: results, process and relationship. Ms. Sewell described it as a three-legged stool – without one of all (Continued on Page 4)

## New Special Education Initiatives at the Middle School

by Lynne Jarvis, Team Chair



You can find us any-time online at [www.gdspedpac.org](http://www.gdspedpac.org) and at Yahoo! Group [gdspedpac1](http://gdspedpac1).

"The highest result of education is tolerance."

Helen Keller (1880-1968)

Superintendent Genovese reviewed GDRSD's performance on last year's MCAS with area parents



The Middle School is pleased to welcome four new Special Education Teachers. Mr. Silverman, along with an interview committee worked throughout the summer to hire, Caitlin Woods, 5th grade liaison, Cheryl Keough, 7th grade liaison, Mary Abodeely, 8th grade liaison, and, to our new Student Support Center, Mary Ruggles as Lead Teacher.

The Student Support Center (SSC) is a new program here at the Middle School that provides direct services and support services to a wide range of students who present with the diagnosis of

Autism Spectrum Disorders. The SSC is staffed by one Special Education Teacher and two Paraprofessionals, all of whom have been trained in Applied Behavior Analysis. The SSC staff provides direct instruction in core curricula areas, behavioral support strategies, inclusion strategies, and groups in social pragmatics.

Co-teaching is well underway for the second year at the Middle School. We have special education teachers and regular education teachers working collaboratively to provide dif-

ferentiated instruction to all learners in numerous classrooms. For the students who need extensive modifications to the curriculum, which cannot be provided in a co-taught model, the Middle School provides a small group setting to deliver instruction as determined by the child's Individual Education Program.

All of these new initiatives are in addition to previously provided academic support in our Learning Centers, which are staffed by special education teachers and paraprofessionals.

## Informative 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Evening with Dr. Genovese

In September, SpedPAC hosted an evening with Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent of the Groton-Dunstable Regional School District, and Cam Huston, Director of Pupil Personnel Services (which includes the Special Education Department) for the parents of District students.

Before opening the floor for questions, Dr. Genovese gave an overview of the District's 2008 MCAS results, the new building-based curriculum model, District staff hiring and District plans for the Prescott School building.

Dr. Genovese distributed copies of an editorial piece from the Lowell Sun newspaper (9/29/08) about the GDRSD entitled

"How to Achieve Academic Excellence." In this editorial, it was stated that GDRSD's scores in the latest MCAS tests "far exceed state averages in all subjects"

and "School Districts throughout Massachusetts should take

notice of Groton-Dunstable's results and consider using its methods. Their students would benefit, as would their MCAS scores."

Dr. Genovese also shared that GDRSD has now demonstrated Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the MCAS for the required 2 consecutive years. Dr. Genovese attributes the improvements to the District's shift in 2006 to focus on a data-driven approach to learning. This approach allowed the District administration and staff to revisit the programs and put more emphasis on addressing the needs of all students in the classroom where needed. After reviewing the needs of students on IEPs, it was determined that more staff training and additional support in the classroom was needed to reach student goals. In 2007, the District reassigned some teaching staff, provided additional professional development and hired 8.4 more paraprofessionals (teacher aides) to work in the classrooms. This increase in the number of

paraprofessionals in the District to 67 produced an effective inclusionary model for its students with special learning and support needs. Dr. Genovese attributes these changes and an exceptional staff of teachers to the improvements in the District's performance.

Dr. Genovese also spoke about a new requirement introduced by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Educational Proficiency Plan or "EPP," to support students who do not attain a competency score of 240 on their 10th grade ELA and Math MCAS. Students who score under 240 will be put on an EPP in 11th grade. The EPP will indicate the student's area of strengths and weaknesses and through a partnership of parent, student and school staff, will determine resources and course selection in the areas where the student needs support.

Cam Huston shared with parents the new District pro-

**(Continued on Page 3)**

# Informative 3rd Annual Evening with Dr. Alan Genovese (cont'd)

(Continued from Page 2)

grams to support children on the autism spectrum. This year there are 2 new classrooms: the R+ (Reinforcing Positive Outcomes) Classroom at Florence Roche and the SSC (Student Support Center) Classroom at the Middle School. These classrooms have been created to provide the extra level of academic and social skills support necessary to help identified students meet success. These classrooms are a home base for students – providing direct, individualized instruction in core curriculum, behavioral support strategies, social pragmatics groups and inclusion strategies. The ultimate goal is to help these students to spend more and more learning and social time in the general classroom. New, highly trained teachers run these classrooms and are supported by ABA-trained paraprofessionals and a behavioral consultant.

Dr. Genovese shared the District's

new building-based curriculum strategy. He referred to it as “decentralizing” the curriculum. This means that the principal is the educational leader for each school, with teacher/curriculum coordinators within each building. This allows some flexibility to work with the on-site personnel and resources and empowers the teachers to be more directly involved in the learning process. Teachers who are selected within the building to be the content-area curriculum coordinator will spend time in the classroom teaching as well as time sharing with fellow teachers an approach specific to the school. This has a direct impact on teaching by providing monitoring, coaching and sharing of experience.

This new site-based curriculum model complements the District's setting up professional learning communities in which the teachers in a school and its administrators continuously see and share learning

and then act on what they learn. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals so that the students benefit. The professional learning community is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a strong strategy for school change and improvement.

The majority of parent questions were answered throughout the evening. At the end, when the meeting was opened up to additional parent questions, there was a question on what support and specific math intervention programs are used within the classroom and in SPED pull-out sessions to help students struggling with math. Ms. Huston shared that TouchMath and Digiblocks are used. Ms. Huston confirmed that it is the responsibility of the special education department to teach math to all students, no matter what their ability or need.

“Opportunity is missed by most people because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”

Thomas Edison (1847-1931)

## GD SpedPAC to Open Parent Resource Center

As part of the GD SpedPAC's goal to further develop outreach programs to the parents in our community, we will be moving into space at the Prescott School building to set up an education resource library and meeting area. If all goes according to plan, the space will become available at the beginning of December.

Last August, the GD SpedPAC approached Dr. Alan Genovese, Superintendent of Schools, with a proposal to gain community space, centrally located in the District, to hold our resource materials and to meet with parents. Having this space will allow us to create an education resource library geared toward, but not exclusive to, parents that would include books, information, and materials from GDRSD, state and federal agencies and complement the

staff resource libraries we have created at the individual schools. The space will most importantly allow us to meet with parents on a scheduled and/or drop-in basis to help them navigate the special education process, learn about their child's disability, or simply inquire about a child's academic or social struggles.

Gaining this dedicated space in the Prescott School building will not only increase awareness and broaden communication with the entire community of parents in the District, but will also allow the GD SpedPAC to pro-actively support the parents of our community – helping them to be more effective contributing members of their child's education team and to be part of a collaborative process with the District.

The Center will be open to all parents and caregivers in the community who need access to educational resources, support, and guidance in the area of educating the “whole child.” The GD SpedPAC is committed to helping all students achieve academic and social success in an emotionally supportive environment.

We thank Dr. Genovese and Cam Huston, PPS Director, for their advocacy and support of our pursuing our own space and thank the Groton-Dunstable School Committee for their supporting vote to provide school building space for the GD SpedPAC's supportive outreach plan to District parents.

Watch for upcoming announcements of an Open House and events.



The Prescott School will soon be home to the Groton-Dunstable SpedPAC's new Parent Resource Center.

## Essential Facilitation for IEP Meetings (FIEP)



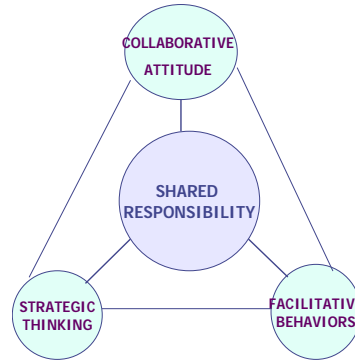
The new facilitation model should make future IEP meetings more productive and less divisive for all participants.

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three elements working together, the meeting will not be successful.

This past summer Cam Huston, PPS Director, and two District Team Chairs attended a week-long training course on Essential Facilitation for IEP Meetings. The Special Education Department is in the process of learning the method and is planning for the future implementation of this type of IEP meeting model in the District. Ms. Huston shared that this meeting model will lend itself well to initial evaluation team meetings.

### INTERACTION METHOD



- Guide IEP groups toward their objectives
- Assist people in building understanding & agreement
- Bring out the best in all group members

"Do not worry about your difficulties in Mathematics. I can assure you mine are still greater."

Albert Einstein  
(1879-1955)



## Reading Programs at Swallow Union

By Gail DesBois, Resource Room Teacher

Two of the several reading programs in place in the Resource Room at Swallow Union are the Wilson Reading System and Reading Milestones.

The Wilson Reading System directly and systematically teaches students how to fluently and accurately decode. Its instruction is interactive and multisensory. It teaches total word construction according to six syllable types. It is multisensory instruction that stresses repetition, sound/syllable segmentation, appropriate pacing and mastery and reading and spelling

of controlled vocabulary. Students learn to encode (spell) as they learn to decode (read). The structure of the language is taught in a very systematic, cumulative manner. Concepts are taught step by step following a specified sequence. This program emphasizes decoding and encoding and should be combined with a literature-based program for comprehension.

Reading Milestones is a language-controlled program built specifically for use with students who have reading dis-

abilities and have problems processing spoken language. It has six levels: Preprimer through 3.5. It is a language-controlled program that was designed and constructed to minimize the gap by beginning with the simplest language to ensure success in reading and by increasing language acquisition (vocabulary, syntax, figurative language). It progresses slowly to more complex language. Students work in small steps, accompanied by constant reinforcement, to ensure continuing success.

## Children's Mental Health and Medication

On Tuesday, December 9th, Dr. Jeffrey Bostic will present an informative lecture on medications for children at 7 pm in the Groton-Dunstable High School Library. Dr. Bostic is Assistant Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, Director of School Psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital, and

Medical Director of the Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Project site at MGH. Dr. Bostic completed his MD and his Doctorate in Education, at Texas Tech in Lubbock, Texas. He completed his Psychiatry Residency at Timberlawn Mental Health Systems in Dallas, Texas, and his Child Psychiatry Fellowship at MGH/McLean. Dr. Bostic has provided psychi-

atric consultation to school districts throughout the Northeast. In addition to his medical degree, Dr. Bostic has a doctorate in education with a specialization in curriculum. Dr. Bostic's research and clinical interests focus on mental health in school settings and partnering with primary care providers to deliver psychiatric care.

# GDMS Explores Turning Points Model

by Steven Silverman  
Principal

Middle School young adolescents are going through rapid developmental growth. Between the ages of ten and fourteen, the young adolescent grows and develops more rapidly than during any other developmental stage except for infancy.

The National Middle School Association (1995) identifies five key areas of adolescent development:

**Intellectual:** Young adolescent learners are curious, motivated to achieve when challenged, and capable of critical and complex thinking

**Social:** Young adolescent learners have an intense need to belong and be accepted by their peers while finding their own place in the world. They are engaged in forming and questioning their identities on many different levels.

**Physical:** Young adolescent learners mature at varying rates and go through rapid and irregular physical growth, with bodily changes that can cause awkward and uncoordinated movements.

**Emotional and Psychological:** Young adolescent learners are vulnerable and self-conscious, and often experience unpredictable mood swings.

**Moral:** With their new sense of the larger world around them, young adolescent learners are idealistic and want to have an impact on making the world a better place.

Due to the fact that young adolescence is a unique, yet critical, developmental stage, schools need to provide learning environments which foster and enhance safe learning communities, caring supportive environments, strong teacher-student relationships and high expectations for their learners. There must be a far greater emphasis placed on aligning middle grades curriculum to rigorous, public academic standards and in the development of authentic, meaningful assessments and stimulating, powerful approaches to teaching

and learning.

With this in mind, Turning Points 2000 enables middle level schools to create caring and challenging learning communities that meet the needs of young adolescents as they reach the "turning point" between childhood and adulthood.

Turning Points seeks to create high-performing schools that support adolescents' emotional, physical, and social needs.

A core belief of Turning Points 2000 is that the primary purpose of middle school education is to promote and enhance young adolescents' intellectual development. Young adolescents need to be able to think "out of the box,"

to identify and solve meaningful higher-ordered types of questions, to communicate and work well with others, and to develop the factual knowledge and skills that are essential for the 21st century. The end result being that they meet or exceed high academic standards. In addition, young adolescents need to develop strong relationships between adults and each other.

Recommendations from Turning Points 2000 to achieve excellence and equity:

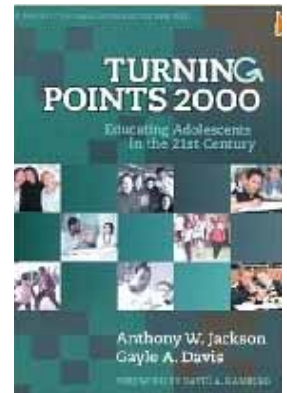
- Teach a curriculum grounded in rigorous, public academic standards for what students should know and be able to do, relevant to the concern of adolescents and based on how students learn best
- Use instructional methods designed to prepare every student to achieve higher standards and become lifelong learners
- Staff middle schools with teachers who are expert at teaching young adolescents and engage teachers in ongoing, targeted professional development
- Organize relationships for learning to create a climate of intellectual development and a caring

community of shared educational purpose

- Govern democratically, through direct or representative participation by all school staff members, the adults who know students best
- Provide a safe and healthy school environment as part of improving academic performance and developing caring and ethical citizens
- Involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development

To enable ALL students to achieve high standards, the Turning Points model requires that:

- ◆ Teachers use equitable and innovative instructional methods that are appropriate for the developmental age of these students.
- ◆ Teachers use authentic instruction as a means to engage their students in higher-ordered, analytical thinking that has "real" value beyond the walls of the classroom.
- ◆ Teachers differentiate their instruction to provide students with many different avenues for learning based on:
  - Their diverse levels of readiness
  - Their diverse interests
  - Their diverse learning styles – how they learn which is influenced by past experiences, learning styles, etc.
- ◆ Teachers use data to drive their instruction. For example, looking at student work to determine if students are understanding or not understanding the material, with the intent of modifying/enriching their instruction if necessary.



Please note that the Middle School is only exploring the Turning Points Model this school year as one of its Student Council goals. Coaches from Turning Points will be providing professional development training for teachers in this model this year. They are scheduled for ten visits this school year. Five visits will be on early release days, while the others will take place during teachers' common planning periods.

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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*Join GD SpedPAC's Yahoo! Group*

GD SpedPAC's Yahoo! Discussion Group:  
[gdspedpac1](http://gdspedpac1)

Free to join, this is a great source of information for parents of children with special needs. Postings include: announcements of lectures and happenings in Groton and surrounding towns; research; news articles; and resource links. It also serves as a forum for parents' questions regarding resources & IEP concerns.

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

## Upcoming SpedPAC Events

(Future lecture schedule to be announced soon. Please visit website and read school newsletters for announcements)

DATE	PROGRAM	LOCATION	TIME
11/19/08 Thursday	SpedPAC Business Meeting	Middle School North Library Conference Room	1:15-2:45 PM
12/9/08 Tuesday	Medication for Children Dr. Jeffrey Bostic, MGH Psychiatrist / Psychopharmacologist	Groton-Dunstable High School Library	7:00-9:00 PM
1/13/09 Tuesday	SpedPAC Business Meeting	Groton-Dunstable High School Library	7:00-9:00 PM
3/11/09	SpedPAC Business Meeting	Middle School North Library Conference Room	1:15-2:45 PM