

The Bridge

VOLUME 7, ISSUE 1

President's Message



Dear Members & Friends,

The new school year is well underway, all of the supplies have been bought and all of the text books covered. The jitters of a new grade, teacher, classmates or even a new school have subsided somewhat and the homework has begun. The beginning of school this year seemed the same as in the past, with little change from the way things have always been. We learned at our first meeting that things are not as they had been. There are new programs starting, pilot programs continuing to develop and programs we have had for years expanding to meet the needs of our specific populations.

The 'Autism Program' at East Lake is now up to three classes, the "Prep Program" is expanding from its start in Berner. And after years of requesting, pleading and yes begging we now have 20 certified "Wilson Reading Teachers" with seven more working on certification this year. We are also excited about all of the talk coming from the district about a social skills program. We are all working for it to become a reality in the near future.

SEPTA could not do any of it without you, our members. With your support and input SEPTA has gone from the PTA for 'those kids in that school' to a PTA working along side all of the PTA's in our district. Many of our past officers are now officers in other PTA's because of their training and dedication to all students.

SEPTA will continue to grow, in size and in ability as more people like you become involved. We look forward to seeing you at our meetings, and getting to know all of you.

Here's to a great school year,

Dan Batik and Lydia Magaddino

Co-Presidents

Pocket Calendars are sold out!

Thanks to all the liaisons who helped make this a successful fundraiser!

Special thanks go to students Brandon Magaddino and Ben Lavender.

Not only did they sell an amazing amount of calendars at East Lake School, but they entertained all the parents and made selling a whole new experience!

**Stephanie Carpenter
Chairperson**

HOLD THAT DATE!

- **October 9th** SEPTA Exec Meeting 7:45PM
McKenna Senior Center
- **October 19th**
SEPTA Third Annual Harvest Dance
- **October 22nd** Kickoff
SEPTA Pizza Fundraiser
- **November 13th** SEPTA General Meeting 7:45 PM
McKenna Senior Center with SPARK Development Center
- **November 18th**
Annual Evening of Giving
- **November 22nd**
Thanksgiving Day
- **January 8th** SEPTA General Meeting 7:45PM
McKenna Senior Center



We could learn a lot from Crayons:

Some are sharp,
some are pretty,

Some are dull, some have weird names and all are different colors....

But they all have to learn to live in the same box.

It is Fall once again and SEPTA invites you to join us!



Massapequa Special Education Parent Teacher Association asks you to attend our next meetings. All parents, teachers, administrators and members of the community are welcome to join us and learn what SEPTA is currently working on.

Our next Executive Meeting on October 9th, 2007

*Our next General Meeting on November 13th, 2007 With SPARK Development Center
The Second Tuesday of the month at McKenna Senior Center at 7:45 PM*

Refreshments will be served.

Massapequa SEPTA is a support organization serving every family who receives special education services in our district.

Membership Have you joined yet?

Hello and welcome to Massapequa SEPTA! Please join us for the 2007-2008 school year, whether you are a returning member or just joining us, all are welcome. Our district serves over 1000 students with special education needs. Our goals are to educate both parents and teachers by presenting information through workshops, speakers and resources on the multitude of services available for children with different learning styles. Every child can learn!

SEPTA also creates social and recreational opportunities for students with special needs. Your membership dollars are vital to our continued success and are greatly appreciated.

YES! I want to join Massapequa SEPTA to benefit all students receiving special education services.

If using this form for more than one child, please attach a separate sheet. If you do not want your membership cards sent home with your in district student, please include a self addressed stamped envelope.

Name: _____ Student Name: _____

Address: _____ Town/Zip Code: _____

Email: _____ Student's Grade _____ Building _____

In District/Out of District Placement _____

Please tear off completed form and send with your check payable to Massapequa SEPTA. Membership is \$8.00 and only \$7.00 for each additional family member.

Additional Member(s) Name: _____

Mail to: **Massapequa SEPTA Membership**

c/o Marta Kiernan

141 N. Richmond Avenue

Massapequa, NY 11758

From the desk of..... Lucille Iconis, Superintendent of Elementary Ed

Welcome to the start of a NEW school year!!! In McKenna's self-contained classes, the term NEW has taken on a fresh and exciting meaning. With a focus on improving reading performance, the district is implementing a new reading program in its self-contained classes. Students in grades three through six will be involved in a program entitled **Read 180**.

Read 180 is an intensive reading intervention program designed to meet the needs of students whose reading is below grade level expectancy. The program directly addresses individual needs through instructional software, high-interest literature, and direct instruction.

This program has a proven track record and is based in scientific research. It is currently used in more than 8,000 classrooms nationwide, and is one of the most thoroughly researched and documented reading intervention programs.

Struggling readers need intensive, individualized instruction to address their unique reading challenges. **Read 180** is designed to provide this type of differentiated instruction. The reading session begins and ends with whole-group teacher directed instruction. Between whole-group meetings, students break into small groups and rotate between the three stations of small-group instruction, computer software, and modeled/independent reading. This comprehensive program equips educators in delivering effective reading, writing, and vocabulary instruction with attention to youngsters' varied learning styles.

Teachers and administrators have been working tirelessly to ensure the program's success; devoting many hours to constructing an implementation plan. Training was delivered by a professional consultant who modeled how to use best practices to meet all students' needs. The consultant will return to monitor program implementation and provide ongoing staff development.

Mrs. Castelli, Mrs. Cohen, and Mrs. Sales share the district's excitement in bringing this program to McKenna's self-contained students and look forward to promoting all students' reading success. Thank you for your continued support!

Respectfully submitted,
Lucille Iconis

FAQ: May disabled students be suspended or removed for violating school code of conduct?

Yes. School district procedures for the discipline of students with disabilities must comply with New York State laws and regulations. Each school district's code of conduct must contain a separate section on disciplinary measures when students with disabilities are involved. Each school district is required to distribute copies of a summary of the code of conduct to all parents or guardians. Each teacher must receive the entire code of conduct.

SEPTA's 4th Annual "Evening of Giving" is just around the corner....

The night's shopping for ticket holders only includes many coupons and discounts from participating stores. Take advantage of the savings and get a jump on holiday shopping! Tickets will be made available for \$10.00 each and the proceeds will benefit all of our children. Join us on

Sunday, November 18th, 2007

From 7:00PM to 9:00PM

at both the Walt Whitman and Roosevelt Field Malls.

For further information contact Debbie Jewell at 541-3705



New Law Reinstates Long-Standing Approach to Hearing



NYS Governor Eliot Spitzer announced that he has signed legislation creating a fair and effective process for parents of children with disabilities who chose to challenge school districts' decisions about which educational services are appropriate for their children.

This new law puts the burden on the school district to prove that it is satisfying its legal obligation to provide an appropriate individualized education program for a student with a disability. At the same time, the law strikes a balance between a parent's desires for private placements and a school district's obligation to pay for costly out-of-district services by requiring parents to prove that a private placement outside of the school district is more appropriate for their child.

"Determining which services are most appropriate for our disabled children is important to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to succeed," said Governor Spitzer. "This bill rightly places the burden of proof on school districts that have the expertise needed to assess options and the responsibilities for implementing individualized educational plans. The bottom line here is that we need to have a system that works in the best interest of children."

Under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), every child with a disability is entitled to receive a "free appropriate public education." To that end, school districts are required to develop a plan to meet the specific needs of each child with a disability. The IDEA protects children's rights by giving parents and school districts the right to an administrative hearing if they cannot agree on which services the child needs.

For more than 30 years, when these administrative hearings were brought in New York, parents were required to prove the appropriateness of the individualized education program. A 2005 U.S. Supreme Court ruling put the burden of proof on the party requesting an administrative ruling, most often parents, for all states that did not have a specific law or regulation on this issue. Because New York did not have a law or regulation on this subject, the Supreme Court's decision effectively reversed the State's longstanding rule.

Many **thanks** to all of the parents of Massapequa who contacted the Governor's office to encourage him to reinstate the law that protects our children's educational rights.



3rd Annual SEPTA Harvest Dance

This is a **free** event, open to the immediate families of children receiving special education services from the Massapequa School District who are invited to enjoy this fun filled social, which includes a family friendly buffet dinner, DJ and dancing, games, arts & crafts and more!

For further information
Contact Ann Marie DeBlasio
at 516 795-9070

To attend the 3rd Annual SEPTA Harvest Dance,
you **must** return this slip by
October 12, 2007 to :
Anne Marie DeBlasio
379 Broadway
Massapequa Park, NY 11762

Student: _____

School _____

of Adults Attending: _____ # of children: _____

Phone : _____

On Friday, October 19th, 2007

6:00PM to 9:00PM

MHS-AMES Cafetorium

Pittsburgh Ave, (off Broadway), Massapequa



The Most Overlooked Reason Why Smart Kids Struggle With Reading

When the two eyes fail to work together as an effective team, performance in many areas can suffer (**reading, sports, depth perception, eye contact**, etc.).

Convergence insufficiency is a common problem of binocular vision. This disorder can affect children or adults but tends to be more common in childhood. Many adults may not feel the onset of symptoms until they get their first bifocal, get a job involving a lot of near-related visual work such as computers or go back to school to further their education.

Convergence insufficiency occurs because of poor eye-teaming ability. Initially when we view something up close the lines-of-sight from each eye should cross directly where we look at. A tendency for the eyes to want to drift outward is present in individuals with this disorder. In order to keep the image clear and single, more effort is required in order to concentrate on the task. This ever increasing effort is taxing and soon results in symptoms. This disorder can run in some families.

Symptoms:

Blurred vision at near, eyestrain while doing near work, headaches, sleepiness while reading, double-vision, frequent loss of place when reading, inaccuracy while checking columns of figures or lists are common complaints. Severe cases can result in an eye turn.

Diagnosis:

A complete and thorough vision exam is required in order to detect this disorder. During this exam tests must be performed at a near distance in order to measure the eyes tendency to drift and how much ability the eyes have to compensate for this effect. If not performed this disorder can be missed by the doctor.

Treatment:

1. **Vision therapy** is by and far the most successful treatment available for convergence insufficiency. The goal of therapy is to build eye teaming ability to a level necessary to overcome the outward drift tendency.

Near point of convergence exercises: An accommodative target, such as the point of a pencil (i.e., **pencil push-ups**), is placed remote to the patient's near point of convergence, (the point at which the lines of sight cross), and gradually brought toward the tip of the nose with the patient converging to avoid diplopia, (double vision). Just before there is a break in fusion, (coordination of separate images of the same object in the two eyes into one), the patient holds fixation, (the direction of the gaze so that the visual image falls on the tiny spot on the macula that is the area of clearest vision), on the target for 10 seconds. This so-called "push-up" is repeated 10 times, 2-4 times a day, until the patient is able to hold fixation to the tip of the nose. The exercises can be tapered and then used on an as-needed basis when the patient notices a recurrence of symptoms.

Other forms of convergence training: Base-out prism reading and stereogram cards may be used by an orthoptist to improve fusional convergence. New, affordable computerized fusional vergence training programs (e.g., Computer Orthoptics) are available. These self-paced programs can be used on a personal computer at the patient's home.

2. **Prism** incorporated into an eyeglass prescription is a second option. Success with this form of treatment is much limited than with vision therapy. Very often adaptation to the new prescription occurs and the convergence insufficiency returns. Base-in prisms for near only: These prisms can be ground into a separate pair of reading glasses, or Fresnel membrane prisms can be fitted over the reading segment of the patient's bifocals."

3. Alternatives include ocular muscle surgery however most experts do not support this mode of treatment today except in very unusual cases.

If you suspect that your child may have an convergence inefficiency, please speak to your occupational therapist and consult a pediatric ophthalmologist.

Reporting in...



I was pleased to represent Massapequa SEPTA at New York State PTA's Summer Experience Leadership Conference at Utica College, July 27-29, 2007. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this event, Summer Experience Leadership Conference is a weekend featuring three days of workshops and hands on training for hundreds of PTA members from around the state. There were over 50 workshops and leadership training opportunities from which to choose. These workshops and trainings give participants in PTA an opportunity to learn how to be more effective, efficient members of their PTA unit and how each unit, council and region's participation in NYS PTA is critical to advocacy and action for our children and youth.

I would like to highlight some special education information I received at two of the workshops. I attended **Middle Level Education and Student Testing in NYS** presented by Elizabeth Sheffer of the New York State United Teachers ("NYSUT"). She reviewed the NYS testing system, how it affects our children and Academic Intervention Services ("AIS"). AIS are additional instruction which supplements the instruction provided in the general curriculum and assists students in meeting the State learning standards and student support services needed to access barriers to improved academic performance. Additional instruction is the provision of extra time for focused instruction and/or increased student-teacher instructional contact time. All school districts must have an AIS plan.

AIS is triggered when a student scores a level 1 or 2 on elementary or intermediate State assessments in ELA, math, social studies or science; scoring below the local passing rate on State assessments required for graduation; or being at risk of not meeting State standards as indicated by a district approved procedure, including those K-3 students who lack reading readiness.

Please take special note: AIS has to be provided to disabled students on the same basis as it is provided to non-disabled students. AIS must be provided in **addition to, and must not supplant, special education services**. Finally, AIS should **not** be indicated on an IEP.

I attended **Special Education Changes in NYS** presented by David Rothfuss of NYSUT Research and Educational Services. Changes caused by the reauthorization of IDEA were discussed. Mr. Rothfuss outlined changes in the federal and NYS law that should be of concern to parents. Federal changes are the excusal of certain CSE members in IEP Team meetings, the revision of IEPs without a CSE meeting after the annual review, limits on the CSE role in reevaluation decisions, limitations on school staff making initial referrals to special education and response to intervention ("RTI"). RTI is not defined in the IDEA law or in regulation, and implementing RTI programs could delay referrals to special education.

He explained that under NYS law, RTI is an optional general education service and is not the sole criteria for a student being identified as learning disabled. However, NYS did not include the use of other alternative research based procedures. NYS prohibits the use of the discrepancy model after July 1, 2012 for students in grades k through 4 to identify learning disabilities in reading. Parents are required to be notified when a student requires intervention beyond that provided to general education students. NYS makes each district responsible for selecting and defining the specific structure and components of the RTI program and the supporting staff development.

Mr. Rothfuss explained that the new NYS law added an integrated co-teaching model to the continuum of services. If a district chooses to have this model it is required to have a special education teacher and a general education teacher. Effective July 1, 2008, the number of students with disabilities cannot exceed twelve. Consultant teacher services and resource room services were also added to the continuum of services.

NYSUT has developed a web-based reporting mechanism to obtain feedback to monitor problems and concerns with IDEA implementation. Mr. Rothfuss urged parents to keep NYSUT informed by using its electronic feedback form at its website, www.nysut.org In addition, at NYSUT website you can access the PowerPoint printouts of both of these presentations as NYSUT and NYS PTA's helpful publication,

A Guide to Special Education.

Respectfully submitted,
Terry Yard-Healy

What Does It Mean to Be Twice-Exceptional (2e)? By Cathy Risberg

As a classroom teacher, I have had a chance to witness first hand what the researchers tell us:

Twice-exceptional (2e) students are gifted students who consistently demonstrate at home, in the classroom or through testing, many or all of the following characteristics:

- ✦ Visual-spatial skills (interest in the arts, including photography and video)
- ✦ Verbal abilities (drama, public speaking, leadership)
- ✦ Imaginative, creative and musically talented
- ✦ Intuitive abilities, often with computers
- ✦ Sensitive, curious and a tendency towards perfectionism
- ✦ Early reading/strong interest in books/high level of reading comprehension
- ✦ Superior level of vocabulary and abstract reasoning/thinking
- ✦ Large number and intensity of interests
- ✦ Highly developed sense of humor
- ✦ Advanced memory skills

In addition, research evidence and my classroom observations confirm that **2e** students also possess unique learning differences. These differences can result in a difficulty in some or all of these areas:

- ✦ Self-Concept
- ✦ Language arts (phonics, spelling, written expression)
- ✦ Computation and memorization
- ✦ Focus, organization, keeping track of assignments and completing them
- ✦ Motor skills

For a **twice-exceptional (2e)** student, there is a definite discrepancy between a student's actual potential and his/her classroom performance or behavior at home. Gifted students who demonstrate clear evidence of having learning differences, sometimes clinically referred to as disabilities, are those students with dyslexia, ADD, ADHD, Asperger's/Autistic, dysgraphia and other learning styles.

Having a learning difference can be particularly challenging to a student when teachers and parents are not aware of the most effective teaching strategies to use. It is essential that we all help every student learn from his/her strengths to provide him/her equal access to the curriculum. Effective strategies are those based on **flexibility, an awareness and appreciation of the student's strengths and a respect for his/her learning differences**. Once these strategies are in place at school and at home, there is less likelihood for a learning difference to become a true disability for the student. In fact, a student's unique approach to learning can often be the key to his/her eventual success as an adult.

Useful Websites for Gifted and Twice-Exceptional

www.NACG.org (The National Association for Gifted Children – consider joining this!)

www.2e.newsletter.com (A wonderful bi-monthly newsletter for parents and educators)

www.allkindsofminds.org (Mel Levine's informative site for all parents and educators)

www.hoagiesgifted.org and www.hoagiesgifted.org/twice-exceptional.htm

<http://uniquelygifted.org> (Like the Hoagies' sites, a comprehensive site for gifted and 2e)



Massapequa SEPTA serves every family who receives special education services in our school district.

Massapequa Special Education



everychild.onevoice.®

Massapequa SEPTA®

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www.wrightslaw.com is a *Special Education Law website that is full of up to date information on everything from writing letters to the rights of an Autistic child.*



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Let Us Hear From You!

Do you have helpful information to share in an issue of *The Bridge*?

Please contact us!

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Visit our website at:
<http://geocities.com/massapequasepta/>

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NYS PTA's STRIVE FOR FIVE is a program where they would like to have each member of PTA reach out and sign up five new members. Let us all work on this great program. Every new member is another leader and advocate for our children and youth. Please visit: www.nysut.org