



FUNFEST 2004!

How many volunteers does it take to run a party? We found out on Sunday, February 1st, when the BSEAC hosted its annual February FunFest. This year's festivities, celebrating the Patriot's upcoming Super Bowl victory, brought together over 200 guests and volunteers who enjoyed games with Mr. 'S', craft activities, mini defense workshops with Tokyo Joe's staff, door prizes, as well as pizza, beverages and desserts. With attendance and number of volunteers up by an unprecedented amount, the FunFest was, again, a true success.

Ann Reynolds coordinated the Fest and brought in donations and door prize items; Barbara Logan and Tamar Lewis rustled up donations of pizza from Domino's, beverages from McHugh's Fine Wines & Spirits, frozen yogurt from TCBY's and gelato from Giordano's Bodega. Volunteer co-coordinators, Karen Rideman and Robin Keller, brought together student volunteers from St. Joseph's, the Belmontian's, Chenery Middle School and the Girl Scouts who helped with all activities. Donna De Pace and helpers painted faces and Dara Gibbons and her crew of girls braided hair and decorated heads with festive clips. This was a great example of the old adage "many hands make light work"; a thousand thanks to all!

Laurie Graham

An Interview with Mrs. Alexander

On January 26, 2004, Debbie Alexander, Headmaster of the Chenery Middle School, was kind enough to grant BSEAC CONNECTIONS an interview regarding special education at Chenery. Headmaster Alexander is now in her 8th year at Chenery, having previously been a principal in Westford, an assistant principal in Maynard, and a math and science teacher for 12 years in Lincoln prior to becoming an administrator. The questions, formulated by the BSEAC CONNECTIONS staff and posed by Bill Alford, and the gist of her responses follow below

1. How are special education services delivered in the lower and upper schools (i.e., resource room, full inclusion, pull-outs, teacher training, number of SPED staff, etc.)?

Headmaster Alexander indicated that she feels "strongly that special education services should be inclusive." Her goal is "full inclusion (with modifications as need be)." This, she indicated, is the case in the lower school and true 95% of the time in the upper school, with modest exceptions for a 7th grade math class and a few instances of small group reading, and the

exemption of a small number of students from foreign language. The goal, continued Headmaster Alexander, is to provide extra help in a manner conducive to inclusion. Even speech therapy, for instance, may be offered in the classroom, as kids don't like to be pulled out. Specialists, she suggested, try, when feasible, to blend into the class as "another pair of hands", at times co-teaching (freeing the room teacher to spend extra time with the students in question).

2. What are Chenery's strengths in special education and in what areas does Chenery need to improve?

One key area of strength, Headmaster Alexander suggested, lies in the talent and dedication of the professional special education staff. Chenery now has 7 special resource teachers – 4 in the lower school and 3 in the upper school (with the particular allocation of the 7th teacher dependent on the student population in any given year). They are ably assisted by a number of aides.

The faculty in general is another strength. There is a strong

commitment to inclusion. In fact, these days the school is increasingly looking at “differentiated instruction” whereby instruction is tailored to the fact that children learn in different ways. Many teachers have been to workshops on this. In the next few weeks, in fact, 10 teachers will have an opportunity to take part in a two day workshop on it.

A third strength is the school’s culture – with Headmaster Alexander determined to underscore that “this [inclusion and respect] is how we operate.” A number of teachers have been to workshops on autism and ADHD in order to learn better how to address these issues.

The prime areas for possible improvement involve caseload and class size. The reduction (for budgetary reasons) of special ed professionals from 8 to 7 has “made a big difference,” as it is no longer possible to have two SPED teachers for each grade. This is especially the case when there is a “bubble” in the size of a grade. As it is, there are roughly 30-40 students on IEPs per class of about 300.

It would also be helpful, suggested the Headmaster, to have additional funding for staff development and workshops, particularly on behavioral and emotional issues. These are issues that concern kids not on IEPs, as well as those on them, as academic demands increase on kids entering their teens.

3. How does Chenery promote social inclusion of kids with special needs?

At Chenery, the goal is that everyone should be included, that all should participate in school life.

One thing we do to facilitate that, indicated Headmaster Alexander, is to encourage children to participate in the wide variety of clubs and other extracurricular activities. We have had equestrian clubs, chess clubs, hip-hop dancing clubs – all that is required is a willing teacher

and six interested kids. The friendships formed in these clubs are important because they are interest based, rather than simply neighborhood based. It has even been possible, noted the Headmaster, once to pay for an aide so a child could participate in a club.

4. What are the special education challenges in the transition from elementary to middle school, and from lower to upper school? How does Chenery deal with those challenges?

It helps in making a transition to have good communications. Headmaster Alexander encouraged parents to meet with teachers and to take advantage of the chance to meet with her at one of the get-togethers she schedules for parents (which are announced in the Chenery newsletter but not always well attended).

Before a child makes the transition from elementary school to Chenery, special ed personnel in each school are in contact. A similar process occurs when a child moves from the lower to the upper school.

5. How does Chenery include LABBB students in the daily workings of the school?

There are now some 39 children in LABBB. Many are in unified arts, music and PE classes. Some in sixth grade are in social studies and science classes with other kids, some in eighth grade are in science and algebra classes with others.

In addition, some 15 eighth graders volunteer two days a week to do tutoring in LABBB as a part of their community service.

The LABBB kids do have their own table in the lunch room. According to the Headmaster, they are there for longer than a single lunch period.

There is also some mixing via after school programs, including, most

notably, Best Buddies. That has been very successful, she noted, in forming one on one friendships and in some group activities. The kids run it and are very creative.

6. What kinds of special needs are typically identified for the first time in middle school?

If a child has been in the Belmont school system, special needs generally have been identified prior to middle school. Adjustments are made, said Headmaster Alexander, and sometimes that may lead to a child being “dismissed” from an ed plan if “adequate progress has been made.” In some circumstances, accommodations may still be made even if a child does not have an ed plan.

The big challenge with identifying special needs for the first time is with children moving into the district at the middle school level.

7. In what ways does Chenery promote acceptance of students with disabilities?

Headmaster Alexander indicated that it is her expectation that the school atmosphere will be conducive to all children being accepted and having a sound physical and emotional learning environment. The school’s core values are CARES – cooperation, acceptance, respect, effort and service – and there is a real effort to instill these in the school. The school has a program in the sixth grade called FACTS – friendship, acceptance, conflict resolution and team-building – designed to foster it.

8. How have the MCAS and the requirements of the NCLB affected service delivery to students with disabilities?

Our aim, said the Headmaster, is to meet student needs. We prepare kids for the tests, but we don’t teach to the tests. We try to give them the skills they need. There are varying accommodations. It is a tense time for everyone. The whole school feels it. Fortunately, the test is untimed, and students can take the whole school day if need be.

9. How can parents be of help to you?

Parents should get involved in the life of the school if they are not already. The Headmaster mentioned the PTO and the periodic coffees she has. They should stay active in the Belmont Special Ed Advisory Council. They should let the town selectmen know their views on the budget. The failure of the budget to keep pace with school needs is what has led some classes to grow to 27 (sixth grade) and the number of special ed professionals to be reduced from 8 to 7.

William Alford

The following article is reprinted for your information, with permission from an advocacy group, the League of Special Education Voters, and does not necessarily represent the views of the BSEAC. The League is an organization whose stated mission is to support the education rights of children with diverse needs by monitoring political developments, to educate legislators, the media, and the general public, and to empower the families of this nation's children with disabilities. Information on President Bush's education policies may be obtained from his campaign's official website, www.georgewbush.com or from the U.S. Department of Education, www.ed.gov.

Summary of the 2004 Democratic Presidential Candidates' Positions on I.D.E.A. As of January 21, 2004

The League of Special Education Voters has contacted the various presidential candidates regarding IDEA reauthorization. The responsiveness of the campaigns has varied widely. As a general rule, the more responsive the candidate, the more important a role IDEA is playing in his/her strategy.

We looked, wherever possible, to voting records and past actions on special education issues. We did not view a desire for "full funding" as a positive unless it was coupled with other substantive ideas. Full funding, in and of itself, is not an answer; special education spending has increased over the past few decades, yet outcomes have not improved enough. There is little reason for us to believe that the answer to our concerns is to simply throw money at the problem. We need a President who will invest in a new paradigm of true accountability, coupled with true enforcement, and who will encourage new strategies to reach students with diverse educational needs.

So far we have not found our hero. We have listed the candidates below in a rough order of preference. Please pass this along to your favorite candidate and ask him/her to step up to the plate. We are prepared to update this 'report card' as needed to reflect the candidates' refining of their positions. See www.SpEdVoters.org for additional information.

2004 Democratic Presidential Candidates on Special Education

Candidate - JOHN KERRY

Pros - IDEA Enforcement. Strong procedural safeguards for parents

Cons - Did not say how he will vote on S1248. No other information on IDEA available.

Summary - Has said more about IDEA in this campaign than any other candidate, including a position paper on his website: www.johnkerry.com/issues/awd/education.html

Candidate - DENNIS KUCINICH

Pros - Voted no on HR1350. Favors short-term objectives. Opposes HR1350 discipline and due process.

Summary - Voting record shows him to be a strong defender of our children. His website discusses disability rights: www.kucinich.us/issues/disability_rights.php

Candidate - WESLEY CLARK

Pros - Working on various educational policies.

Cons - No voting record. Minimal details on related issues.

Summary - Short on details. www.clark04.com/issues/schoolequity

Candidate - HOWARD DEAN

Pros - Adopted the Coelho platform (but does not mention educational aspects)

Cons - Vermont not known for innovative and effective special education programs

Summary - No reason to think he will be progressive on IDEA. www.deanforamerica.com

Candidate - JOHN EDWARDS

Pros - Opposed to attorney fee caps.

Cons - Voted to bring S1248 out of committee. No other information on IDEA available

Summary - Had a chance to strengthen IDEA in Committee, but did not step up to the plate. www.johnedwards2004.com

Candidate - AL SHARPTON

Pros - Supports constitutional amendment guaranteeing every American an education.

Cons - No voting record. No other information on IDEA available.

Summary - Nothing explicit on IDEA at campaign website: www.sharpton2004.org/

November Meeting Welcomes New SPED Director, School Board Members

At BSEAC's November meeting, we welcomed Sally Smith, Belmont's new Director of Special Services, along with Elizabeth Gibson and John Bowe of the School Committee. Sally Smith opened the meeting with a brief overview of her initial days on the job, and spoke about her vision of special education, as well as the challenges facing her as SPED director, given the present difficult fiscal situation. In this regard, she emphasized the need for careful use of the pre-referral process, which is the first step in evaluating whether a student needs "specially designed instruction" (i.e., an IEP) to make effective progress, or whether the student can be served effectively with accommodations (i.e., without being found eligible for special education). Ms. Smith also spoke about Belmont's continuing efforts to include children with special needs in regular classrooms, noting that at the preschool and elementary level, the use of paraprofessional aides assisting the classroom teacher (and supported by the principal, specialists, and parents), has worked successfully. She noted that it is more challenging to implement this model at the middle and high schools, where multiple classroom teachers were involved, but committed to continuing efforts to support and improve inclusion in the higher grades. In her remarks and in a follow-up question and answer period, Ms. Smith also touched (among other things) on what Belmont is doing to ensure that children on IEPs are accessing the general curriculum. She also mentioned efforts to obtain additional training for staff at the LABBB collaborative in specialized techniques for teaching the increasing number of children in that program with autism spectrum disorders. School board members

Elizabeth Gibson and John Bowe were active and interested participants in the evening's discussions, and they each recognized the importance of providing the necessary funding for special education, despite the many fiscal challenges facing the school committee and the town.

Helen Golding



Sibling Issues

Suzanne Wildman, a therapist with training in early childhood development and a mother of a 12-year-old son with Asperger's Syndrome spoke to BSEAC members on issues for siblings of children with disabilities. Ms. Wildman addressed questions such as when and how much to share with siblings about their sibling's disabilities. Start by testing out what they already know and then provide various sources (written, audio-visual, as well as verbal) which can offer information so important in avoiding common misconceptions and fears. Young children often need reassurance that the condition cannot be "caught" when they get older. Older children may need help with worries and questions about their sibling's future. When a disability is visible, it is easier for siblings to understand. PDD and ADHD can look "invisible" on first glance to other children, making behaviors associated with these disorders particularly hard to understand and accept.

All parents may spend more time involved with meeting the needs of their special needs child. Often, this means tolerating or working with behaviors which are disruptive to siblings - behaviors siblings

know are not age-appropriate or easy to ignore. Siblings often develop feelings of resentment when they find themselves in the role of "my brother's keeper", providing extra help in the family in watching out for or filling in for tasks their siblings special needs necessitate. When this happens, it can be helpful to offer options to your child - "you can do chores or keep an eye on your sister" or help him negotiate the "extras" asked of him.

Supporting interests and friendships outside the home can be especially important for these children. It is even more important to avoid comparisons between siblings in these families. Sometimes, being a sibling of a special needs child is lonely - like being an only child in terms of absence of real companionship. It can be easier for siblings in families of three or more where they can experience a more typical sibling relationship and have someone else who can understand their feelings. Embarrassment and isolation are nearly universal concerns for siblings - keeping family communication open and providing opportunities for the sibling to express frustrations to you or another trusted individual is vital. At times, when sibling's behaviors include "taunting" or aggressive responses to their special needs sibling, professional help may be helpful. Just as for parents of special needs children, siblings often feel guilt, loss, and shame (why him and not me?). They may self-impose pressure to achieve or over-achieve in "compensation."

There are, however, unusual opportunities for children whose siblings have special needs. They often develop greater insight, social competence, advocacy skills, and tolerance. Many times, they mature more quickly. Ms. Wildman recommended two books for members who would like to explore these issues more — *Views From our Shoes* by Donald Meyer and *Sibshop* by Donald Meyer and P. Vadasy, which

discusses the range of emotions siblings experience along with many practical suggestions for parents.

Barbara Logan

BSEAC January 14, 2004

Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)

Speaker: Donna Murphy, Federation for Children with Special Needs
1-800-331-0688
www.fcsn.org

This organization supports parents who have children with special needs, young adults with special needs, and special needs professionals. They have an excellent website with links to many other organizations (e.g. the DOE) and resources, and they staff a phone line with people—parents and relatives of children with disabilities—who are available to answer any questions you might have regarding children with special needs. In addition, the Federation runs a series of six workshops that are pertinent to parents with children who have special needs (e.g. what are your rights, IEPs, going to a team meeting).

Ms. Murphy began by noting that

the IEP specifies services that support access to the general curriculum throughout the day. Four items tie together to make up the general curriculum:

- Massachusetts curriculum frameworks (consistent across communities in state)
- Local school district curriculum frameworks
- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (federal educational legislation)
- High-stakes testing (MCAS in Massachusetts)

- Every child has the right to have access to the general curriculum and that includes participating socially in the life of the school.

A good IEP addresses both access and accountability, and includes the following:

- Parents' vision for their child for the next 1-5 years
- Accommodations (supports that the child needs)
- Modifications (changes in how and what information is taught)
- Specific goals
- How services are to be delivered
- How progress will be tested

Parents might want to think about these six things before their IEP meeting. In addition, parents will be asked about what their concerns are, and they can add which skills they think should be stronger, and describe the strengths and weaknesses of their child. The strengths, interests, and preferences of the child are important because they can provide a way to approach teaching the child; if teachers can approach subjects through the interests and preferences of the child, the child will be more likely to learn.



Ms. Murphy suggested that parents have a calendar for every child on an IEP and list things like dates of team meetings, when consent forms must be signed, and the dates of the forms.

The next part of the IEP should describe the student's disability, and the evaluations made by school teachers and support staff. Parents have the right, under Massachusetts and federal laws, to

copies of the evaluations two days prior to the meeting. This allows parents to not be blindsided at the meeting and to come to the meeting prepared with questions. Parents will want to consult the previous year's IEP to see if the goals and objectives were met, and what kind of progress was made.

The description of the disability and the assessment results, along with a description of the accommodations and modifications needed, comprise the Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP). There are two pages of PLEP on the IEP: 1) PLEP A, covering the general curriculum, and 2) PLEP B, covering social and emotional issues, as well as age-specific skills and life skills. Special attention should be paid to how the disability affects progress. PLEP is focused on progress in the general curriculum and is used to write accommodations and modifications. Ideally, the IEP has more accommodations than modifications.

Goals are a part of the IEP. The components of a measurable annual goal—IEPs are typically written for a year—include:

- Target behavior—the skill or behavior in need of change
- Condition—the circumstances under which the target behavior is to occur
- Criteria—the acceptable level of performance of the target behavior.

Objectives break each measurable annual goal into discrete, short-term, measurable, intermediate steps. The data collection strategy for assessing the goals and objectives includes the data sources, the data collection schedule, and the person collecting the data, and should be a part of the IEP.

The service delivery form on the IEP is important. It tells parents where the services will be given (e.g. classroom, resource room), describes the services and the

types of people administering the services (including their credentials), and spells out the service schedule and duration of the service. Parents should be aware of the school cycle (i.e. 5 day cycle, 6 day cycle, 10 day cycle) because this affects how often the student receives services. Finally, the IEP has places to write in more individualized supports, describe how the student will participate in the MCAS, and add any additional information (e.g. transitions, parent participation, and other relevant information). Medical issues can be part of the IEP but don't have to be.



Parents have three responses to the IEP. They can:

- Accept the IEP as developed
- Reject the IEP as developed
- Reject portions of the IEP

Parents should request a meeting to discuss the rejected IEP. Parents have 30 days to sign an IEP; the school system cannot deliver services until the IEP is accepted and if the present IEP is rejected, services revert back to those described on the last accepted IEP. Ms. Murphy suggested that parents accept that a child is eligible and then write a précis of what parts of the IEP they accept and what parts they reject. Every three years, the school system will reevaluate the child to determine if the child continues to be eligible for services. If parents can't agree on a placement, they can reconvene the meeting in 10 days and bring placement options to that meeting.

Parents will want to get things in writing and parents have the right to reject an IEP at any time. An IEP is a contract and a school system is in noncompliance if they don't follow the IEP.

Stephanie Woerner

STEPPING DOWN AND STEPPING FORWARD

Dear BSEAC Parents,

During the summer of 1998, after having lived in Belmont for only one year, I had the privilege of becoming a Co-Chair of the BSEAC. In the intervening years, Cindy Pfister, Laurie Graham, and I, together with numerous other BSEAC parents, have transformed this organization into a significant player on the Belmont educational scene. With a mailing list of more than 170 families, ten workshops a year, the February Funfest, a newsletter, a website, participation on the district inclusion committee, and a support group, we are a dynamic organization which provides essential services to parents of special needs children. New initiatives are in the works: the development of our resource library, our first annual Appreciation Awards, and the opportunity for parents to speak at teacher meetings about their experiences.

As the number of children with significant disabilities in our schools increases, BSEAC parents will increasingly need the support and information our organization provides. The BSEAC requires the vision and enthusiasm of parents of younger children in order to closely align its goals and services with existing and future needs. For my part, my special needs child, who was in first grade when we moved to Belmont, will be entering eighth grade next year. It's time for me to find a paying job and to focus on transitioning my son into high school and young adulthood.

According to the BSEAC's by-laws, officer elections will be held in June, with nominations accepted in April. I ask you to take the time to consider seriously whether stepping forward to co-chair the BSEAC is something you are

willing to do. I can tell you that my Co-Chair Laurie Graham is a terrific person to work with — and also that she cannot do this job alone. Please think about the role the BSEAC plays in your life, and whether you would like the BSEAC to continue to be here for you and your child.

What are the essential requirements of the job? Good communication skills, an amicable working relationship with school professionals, and a desire to learn and to help other parents. I would be happy to speak with anyone who would like more details. You can contact me at 617-484-2218 or amanda.green@earthlink.net. Finally, I thank you most sincerely for the support you have given me over the past six years. I am grateful to have had the chance to know and to work with so many wonderful parents, on behalf of so many wonderful children.

Amanda Green

Calendar of Events

Friday, Feb. 20-Saturday, Feb.21, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. *Teaching Verbal Behavior in Early Intervention*. This two-day workshop will guide parents and therapists in the assessment, development and implementation of ABA programs that emphasize the teaching of verbal behavior in the home and other natural environments. \$195.00, Merrimack College, North Andover. Register at www.verbalbehaviornetwork.com/Registration%20Forms/VBEI_02_20_04.pdf. For additional information, contact donna@vbtraining.com

Saturday, Feb. 21, 10:00-11:00 a.m. *Father's Bowling Event* – an event sponsored by the Mass Down Syndrome Congress for dads and their son or daughter with Down syndrome. Woburn Bowladrome. \$12 per parent/child

couple (includes shoes). For more information or to register, send email to Charlie: bowling@mdsc.org

Thursday, Feb. 26, 7:00 p.m. Fundraiser and private screening of the British film "Hear the Silence". A mother seeks the cause of her son's regression into autism. \$50 minimum suggested donation goes to support medical research into autism. West Newton Cinema, 1296 Washington St., West Newton, 617-964-6060



Wednesday, March 3 – 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. *Your Fifth Grader and the DARE Program*. Find out about DARE and learn some ways to reinforce the important message of drug and alcohol prevention. Presented by Kristen Henebery of the Belmont Police Dept and Erica Dinerman of the Families First Parenting Programs. Hosted by Belmont Parent Education Series. Chenery, Room 103. Pre-registration suggested: e_dinerman@yahoo.com



Tuesday, March 9, 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. Self-Esteem: *How Do Children Get It? How Do Parents Give It?* Presented by Families First, hosted by the Ashland PAC. Ashland High School Library, West Union Street, Ashland. Contact Katy Bach 508-881-9076 or hellooutthere@comcast.net

Friday, March 12, 9:30 a.m. – noon. *Legal Updates*. Attorney Daniel Ahearn of the Landmark

School Outreach Program will focus on current legal issues with an emphasis on children with LD. Presented by SPAN at the Charles River Arc, 7 East Militia Heights Rd, Needham. Register at least a week in advance, \$25. For more information, go to www.spanmass.org or contact Noreen Curran, 617-489-2745

Saturday, March 20, 8:00 a.m. – 4:45 p.m. *Visions of Community*. The annual conference presented by the Federation for Children with Special Needs for parents and professionals who work to enhance educational, mental health, health and family support services for children with disabilities. World Trade Center, Boston. \$50 registration before Feb. 27; \$65 per person after Feb. 27. Register on-line at www.fcsn.org or call 617-236-7210.



Saturday, March 20. *21st Annual Massachusetts Down Syndrome Conference*. Workshops for parents, teachers, professionals and young adults with Down syndrome. Go to www.mdsc.org for details. Worcester Centrum, Worcester.

Thursday, March 25, April 1, and April 8, 7:30 – 9:00 p.m. *Getting Ready of Adolescence: Living with Your Sixth Grader*. A three-part series, providing parents with information about adolescent development. Presented by Erica Dinerman of Families First Parenting Programs, hosted by the Belmont Parent Education Series. Chenery, Room 103. Pre-registration suggested: e_dinerman@yahoo.com

Monday, March 29, 7:00-9:00 p.m. *Raising Resilient Children*. Dr. Robert Brooks will provide parents

with strategies they can use to ensure their children are emotionally prepared for life's challenges and setbacks. Hosted by the Belmont Parent Education Series. Belmont High School Auditorium.

Thursday, April 1, 7-9 p.m. *An Introduction to Boardmaker Communication Symbol Software*. A step-by-step workshop, which will walk parents through the process of creating communication tools for their children. Easter Seals Training Center, 89 South St, Boston. \$40.00. Contact Thao Duong, 800-244-2756 ext. 328 or Thaod@eastersealsma.org



Saturday, April 3, 9 a.m. – 1 p.m. *Writing Aids for Students with Disabilities*. Hands-on experience with selected software programs is offered through the Easter Seals Assistive Technology Parent Workshop. Easter Seals Training Center, 89 South St, Boston. \$40.00. Contact Thao Duong, 800-244-2756 ext. 328 or Thaod@eastersealsma.org



Thursday, April 29, 7-9 p.m. *Introduction to Alternative Access*. Learn about hardware and software that enables students to operate computers and control devices in their environment. Easter Seals Training Center, 89 South St, Boston. \$40.00. Contact Thao Duong, 800-244-2756 ext. 328 or Thaod@eastersealsma.org

**BELMONT
DEPARTMENT OF
STUDENT SERVICES
2003-2004**

EARLY CHILDHOOD

LIASON - Anne Palches –
Winn Brook

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

Jessie Zemarel – Winn Brook
Alison Goulder – Winn Brook
Jenny Nichols – Winn Brook

**ELEMENTARY RESOURCE
TEACHERS**

Ellen Payne – Butler
Fran Perlman – Butler
Kristin Spadafino – Burbank
Karen O’Leary – Burbank
Beth Losk – Wellington
Mary Mahony – Wellington
Nancy Martin – Winn Brook

INCLUSION SPECIALIST

Peg Hamilton – Winn Brook,
Chenery, HS

**OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPIST**

Jessie MacLellan
Jillian Marcucci – Assistant

PHYSICAL THERAPIST

Debbie Dayton

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS

Joanna Colton – Winn Brook
Kristin Flynn – Burbank, Butler
Karen Reed – Wellington
Carla Hawkins- Chenery
(Metco)
Joe Quinn – Chenery
Efi Fotiades – Chenery
Erin McElligott – Chenery
Jim Brown – High School
Toby Brown – High School
Manuela Martin – High School
Tammy Leary – High School

**MIDDLE SCHOOL SPED
TEACHERS**

Rhonda Cherry
Kathleen Dailey
Diane Herbst
Sue Karaczkowski
Denise LaPolla
Michelle Sierota
Megan Long

**HIGH SCHOOL SPED
TEACHERS**

Dick Allen
Lauren McLaughlin
Alison Lockwood
John Sullivan
Alison Thalmann

**SPEECH/LANGUAGE
PATHOLOGISTS**

Alexandra Boudette – Winn
Brook
Danielle Jarjura – Chenery
Sue Kemp - Wellington
Kristin Lester – Wellington,
Winn Brook
Rene Magier – Burbank
Tina Patsos – Butler, Chenery
Nancy Smock – Winn Brook
(Pre-School)

MENTAL HEALTH

Dr. Charlie Brown,
School Psych – Butler,
Winn Brook

Dr. Susan Giurleo,
School Psych –
Chenery

Dr. John Kearny, School
Psych – Burbank, Well.

Paula Lazar, School
Adjustment Counselor –
High School

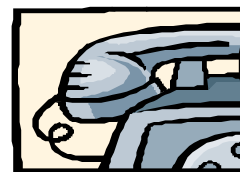
Eileen Wiznitzer,
School Psych, High
School

**LABBB COLLABORA-
TIVE TEACHERS/
BUTLER**

Cindy Crowley
Sara Vlasak
Brenda Souza
Shelley Johnston,
Speech/Language

**SPECIAL EDUCATION
EVALUATOR**

Ray Bohn



**STAY IN TOUCH,
KEEP CONNETED**

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Belmont Special Ed Parents' Advisory Council Meeting, December 16, 2003

Understanding Behavior at Home and School

Guest Speaker: Mindy Davin, LICSW

Some sixteen to eighteen parents from Belmont and surrounding communities attended the December meeting with guest speaker, Mindy Davin, to discuss managing behavior at home and school. Ms. Davin, a clinical social worker, is a consultant for the Belmont schools, working with children and families from the Wellington and Chenery schools. She also consults with the Walker School, a 766 day and residential school in Needham, and is the mother of four-year old twins.



Ms. Davin began with an aphorism she has found helpful, "Serenity is not freedom from the storm, but peace within the storm." How can we help our children (and ourselves) weather their emotional storms? Our objective should always be to instill resilience in children, to provide the tools so they can deal with stress and pressure, to cope effectively with everyday challenges. (She drew from and highly recommends *Raising a Resilient Child*, by Brooks & Goldstein) " Problem behaviors should be thought of in terms of their underlying causes and may result from neurological, social-emotional, and learning issues. Examples of behaviors

parents volunteered included swearing, yelling, hitting, needing many breaks during school or homework, leaving the classroom, refusing to do school work, and exploding at the breakfast table.



Several parents in attendance suggested that school is very stressful for their children. Even if the child manages during the school day, mothers see a "melt down" after school. Anxieties and frustrations also are expressed in problems before school. Ms. Davin provided an important observation as a special ed counselor: it is easier to work with families where the school is seeing some of the same behaviors, although this is not typically the case. So it is more common for kids to express their frustrations at home, but this makes *both* parenting and working with the school more challenging.

A lively discussion developed over the issue of consequences for problem behaviors. Some mothers felt that children must learn to be accountable for their actions and wondered what is the best way to accomplish this without seeming to reward or allow bad behavior. Ms. Davin emphasized the importance



of waiting, riding out the storm, prior to imposing consequences. In the midst of the storm parents

should simply try not to escalate the situation. Several parents volunteered that time-outs do not work, though others felt they do as a time-out for the *parent*, that is, a chance for the parent to walk away and calm down (although a highly anxious child may not be able to tolerate even such brief separations). Ms. Davin also emphasized taking a parent's time-out is important modeling for the child of a good coping tool. A strongly recommended book was *The Explosive Child* by R. W. Greene. Some other parents had had good experiences with behavior modification techniques and reward charts (though again, others had not).



Ms. Davin provided guideposts for raising resilient children. She listed the importance of validating our children's feelings, listening



and modeling empathy. Other guideposts include accepting the child's unique temperament, focusing on their strengths, and viewing mistakes as learning opportunities. She closed by reiterating the importance of taking care of ourselves and collaborating with the school.

Dr. Robert Brooks is speaking Monday March 29th at BHS auditorium, 7 to 9 pm.

Linda Blum