



An Interview with Sally Smith

Sally Smith is Director of Student Services for the Belmont School system. On May 3, she graciously took time during this - the busiest part of the school year - to answer questions on a variety of topics suggested by members of the BSEAC. Her thoughts follow.

Background. Sally is a native of Arlington and a graduate of Mary Washington College (part of the Univ. of Virginia) and BU. She traces her interest in education, especially special education, to her mother, who was a first grade teacher. Sally would visit her mother's classroom and take in her teaching work. "From the time I was little, I gravitated toward kids who were having difficulties in learning." As a psychology major, "I continued to work with children with a variety of need. Upon graduation, I took a year off in order to decide whether I would pursue a graduate degree in Special Education or Research Psychology." Sally taught in Virginia, working with children with developmental delays before moving on to graduate work at BU in special ed, and deciding ultimately that a career working with kids would be more gratifying than one in pure research.

After earning her graduate degree, Sally worked in the Lynnfield public schools as a "self-contained classroom teacher" and as a K-6 resource teacher. "Inclusion was not big then, but I did pilot a successful inclusion model in a grade 4 class."

In 1981, Sally came to Belmont as a consulting teacher at both the middle and elementary school levels. She has also been the inclusion specialist for students with complex learning needs and autism, integrated pre-school teacher, and early childhood liaison. These experiences gave her "lots of hands-on experience." This, in turn, has proven enormously useful to her in her current administrative role, as "time in the trenches" is important to her understanding the priorities teachers have and the challenges that they confront, not to mention the stress level they may experience.

Educational Philosophy. Sally believes more in determining what educational program is most suitable for the individual than in adherence to an abstract set of principles in and of themselves. She believes deeply in inclusion, but thinks that its value for any individual child will depend on that child's specific needs and the environment in which the child is being placed. Class size, the availability of adult assistance, and time for specialists and teachers to consult will be factors to take account of in building a suitable program.

Challenges. Sally is hopeful that more positions will be restored in the future and that new ones will be added; in particular, (1) The need at the high school for a director of guidance or half time special ed assistant to work with the principal and assistant principals at the high school level, (2) At least one more resource person at the middle and elementary school levels, because of the growing number of children with special needs and the complexity of those needs, (3) The growth of early childhood classes from 2.5 to 3 for pre-schoolers, and (4) Another inclusion specialist to work with Peg Hamilton, given the number of questions arising regarding students along the autism spectrum or with integrative disorders.

On a different note, Sally observed that more parents are challenging eligibility criteria and that this presented a challenge. A crucial question, she stressed, is whether the child is making effective progress. At times, some accommodations might be sufficient. The utility of differentiated instruction is greater when one has smaller classes and more experienced teachers. Fortunately, she said, there are growing numbers of teachers who are skilled at presenting ideas in differentiated ways aimed at children's different learning styles. Less happily, this is much more difficult to achieve as class sizes grow. Class size should be an issue of major concern.

Sally noted that in recent years there has been a considerable increase in emotional difficulties both among Belmont students and more generally nationally. The Walker School partnership program has helped to meet the need of some of the students with emotional or behavioral difficulties. This program, housed at the Wellington for elementary and middle school, provides student and family counseling and team consultation and training by a trained clinical social worker.

Sally is at an early point of looking at the idea of establishing an elementary school, LABBB type program in Belmont for students with emotional disabilities. She indicated that all signs are the population of children who might benefit from such programs is likely to grow, making it worth Belmont thinking about doing more in-house.

MCAS. The MCAS, said Sally, has both pros and cons. On the one hand, it offers accountability, ensuring that school systems won't water things down too much for special needs kids but will push them to realize their maximum potential. On the other hand, for certain kids with significant disabilities, it may not be the best way to measure them, even with accommodations. A functional assessment may be more relevant for some kids.

Looking Ahead. In response to a question regarding ways in which parents can be constructively engaged, Sally suggested that parents be advocates both for general school funding and for special ed funding. The former, she said, is needed so that highly qualified teachers can be hired and adequately compensated and small class size encouraged. Many of the best teachers in both regular and special ed, noted Sally, were people who were dual certified - in both a subject matter and in special ed.

Sally also indicated that she hoped parents who had concerns about their children's IEPs would work with their teams, asking questions, requesting second meetings as needed instead of rejecting all or parts of IEPs before taking such

steps. Parents, of course, need to advocate strenuously for their children, but Sally indicated that she thought that many issues could be worked out in this less adversarial way, to the betterment of all concerned.

-- William Alford

Effective Inclusion in the Classroom

February Meeting

A football flew about the room at the BSEAC's February 11th meeting, as parents played 'the name game', a teaching technique used to promote community and focus within the classroom. So began a lively discussion about effective inclusion in the classroom, led by Chenery Middle School teachers Mike McAllister and Vicky Sutton, along with Belmont's Inclusion Specialist, Peg Hamilton. The panel discussed, "What is inclusion?"

6th grade teacher, Mike McAllister, stated, "At the core of inclusion is the child's feeling of being included and truly feeling like a member of the classroom. It is the classmates, not just the teacher, who create true inclusion."

5th grade teacher, Vicky Sutton, spoke of the teacher's investment in inclusion, saying, "My job with parents and the team is to figure out how the classroom is going to be the best learning environment for everyone." This involves open-mindedness, problem solving, and lots of meetings with people. There's a need to know a lot about the inclusion student, but also about each of the other students, as well. However, the variety of learning styles and needs makes for a rich classroom environment. Sutton stated, "Inclusion is about celebrating how people learn, make progress, sometimes fail, get back up, and try again."

Peg Hamilton said, "Success comes from the child's inner drive to be a part of the class. However,

educators have to be very well trained, parents have to be fully committed, and administrators have to be very accommodating to make it work. "It is vital that the school community is accepting and willing to embrace differences. It takes more people, money, time, education, and attention to include all children." Collaboration between the parents and the school staff members is very important. It is essential to work as a member of a team in setting clear goals and a vision as to what inclusion would look like for the student.

Managing Inclusion

Physical: Hamilton outlined the physical

areas of management as being the layout, storage spaces, wall space, signs and labels, accessibility, placement of the computer or adaptive equipment, traffic flow, special seating, and wheelchair accessibility. It is important to think about promoting work in small groups, friendships, and areas for quiet work. McAllister added, "If you let the kids have a role in creating change in the classroom, then they will let you know if a situation is OK. There needs to be consistency and routine. Everyone needs to have the same opportunity."

Organizational: Hamilton stated, "Organizational management starts with the development of clear IEP goals and objectives." It defines, "Who will do what?" It also defines, "Where can I get what?" in determining how the room will be organized. This includes gathering, making, and displaying visuals and other materials. McAllister added that organizational management requires "everyone being consistent with the goals and objectives. We always agree on these for a special needs student before beginning a project. Some goals are specific to the content of the lesson and others to the IEP objectives. If we let the child know why they're doing what they're doing, they get more out of it." Sutton further stated that having structures and systems in place in advance is very important for managing 23 kids.



Procedural: Procedural management entails deciding upon and posting the classroom rules, expectations and consequences for behavior. This helps make children feel safe. Establishing a transition tool helps children know when to expect a change and makes transitions go much more smoothly. When students are involved in generating these rules and goals, they feel more invested in the goals and included.

Psychosocial: The teacher creates the atmosphere of inclusion in the classroom by the vision that he brings to the class. It is important to share this vision by talking with the class about the different needs and strengths of every person, and to read and offer books to support this understanding. When challenges come up, they need to be addressed, so that children have a sense of “this is how we’ll deal with the situation” and all children feel safe. The teacher should avoid having children choose their own partner, to eliminate the stress a child might feel in having to choose someone or in being rejected. The teacher should create partnerships for various projects, and should change the partnerships every few months.

Behavioral: In every classroom, a teacher needs to assess various behaviors and find the motivators for the behavior. Then alternate behaviors need to be chosen and implemented. A child needs to be given tools to help eliminate the behavior before it starts. Good behavior should receive recognition. Also, careful thought needs to be given to teach a lesson and include a child who is at a totally different level than most of the class. Activities in a class can always be structured to include children at all levels.

Instructional: For the inclusion child, the teacher will decide how to pre-teach and practice the skills that the child will need in the classroom. Teachers will need to set up schedules, key concepts, expectations, and visual supports. Schedules of the day are very important for a child with special

needs in helping to reduce anxiety. Sensory breaks help all children to recharge and then refocus on their work.

At the close of the meeting, the panel addressed the ways in which parents can provide help for teachers and promote inclusion for their child:

- Give immediate feedback when the child is NOT getting something.
- Stay involved through classroom opportunities, so you can observe your child in a natural setting. Be a parent volunteer.
- Share successful strategies to support learning and positive behavior used at home.
- Provide organizational support at home to make sure the student is ready each day.
- Support student responsibility for homework and notices. Require a homework space and time each night to do homework and organize papers.
- Follow through at home with behavioral, organizational and academic strategies.

The parents then shared ideas via a teaching technique, give one/ take one, to come up with more ideas for helping teachers and promoting inclusion:

- Establish a good rapport and communicate with your child’s teacher (email works well).
- Inform teachers about your child’s personality, strengths, and challenges.
- Help the teacher understand your child’s special behaviors.
- Teach disability awareness to the teacher, staff and administrators.
- Tell the teacher about a child’s difficulty with particular homework and her reactions to class experiences.
- Tell the teacher which peers the child works well with.



Lastly, the panel provided ideas for ways that parents can help in general:

- Get involved in school affairs.
- Get involved in community activities. Allow people to “get to know you and your child”. Ignorance breeds fear.
- Take an active role in educating the school community about your child.
- Provide as many typical experiences for your child as possible that require appropriate behavior.
- Advocate in the larger community for educational resources.

-- Jennifer Dubost

Assistive Technology & Learning Disabilities- April Meeting

Ms. Cindy Aiken, Director of Assistive Technology, Easter Seals, gave us a PowerPoint presentation outlining assistive technology. Assistive Technology tools for students with learning disabilities can be as simple as a pencil grip or as complex as state of the art high tech ones. The goal is to find the appropriate student/ technology match.

Writing: Assistive Technology can help with written expression as well as the physical act of putting words onto paper.

A student with poor organizational skills would benefit from a software such as *Inspiration* or *Draftbuilder*. These allow the user to input data in small segments and slowly build into a finished document.

For students with difficulty with the physical act of putting pen to paper there are modified computers, hardware, and software programs with talking text, word prediction, and screen readers.

Dragon NaturallySpeaking 7 is a

speech or voice recognition software that allows you to create documents all by voice.

Organization: Daily living requires the student with disabilities to fulfill many organizational tasks. Electronic organizers such as PDA's, digital tape recorders, alarms, and the software Inspiration may be helpful.

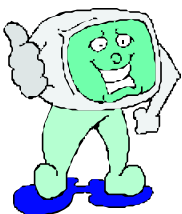
Reading: Some strategies for students with reading problems are alternative format books, text to speech software such as *Read Please, Read and Write, Kurzwell, Write:Outloud, WYNN, Cast E Reader.*

Alternative Access to Computers: Mini-keyboards, enlarged keyboards, on-screen keyboards, keyboard enhancing software, word prediction software are all available. Mouse alternatives also available.

The Easter Seals office offers professional workshops, training sessions, demonstrations of the various softwares, etc. for parents and teachers. They are also available to do classroom assessments.

For more information contact www.EasterSealsMA.org or call 800- 244-2756.

-- Denise Smith



All about testing

March meeting

Joan Axelrod, a psycho-educational diagnostician in private practice in Lexington and a consultant in the Belmont Public Schools started out by discussing what testing can and can't do.

What testing can and can't do

- Testing is mandated by law for students in special education to determine eligibility and to monitor progress (students have to be re-evaluated every 3 years)
- Testing can tell you how your child is doing relative to other students nationally (deficits are defined relative to national population, although other criteria include deficits relative to strengths)
- Testing can tell you if your child is making expected progress (effective progress depends on both the nature of the disability and the child's cognitive level)
- If well analyzed, testing can tell you where your child needs help or remediation and where s/he is relatively strong
- We do not have tests that directly measure why a child is having learning difficulties (e.g. ADHD; dyslexia)
- Many of the tests we give students do not parallel the tasks we ask students to do in the class. Evaluating writing is difficult as most tests don't ask students to write compositions.. Evaluating reading can be difficult as most tests ask students to read a paragraph rather than a chapter.

The quality of information gained from a test is dependent upon the evaluator, as is how the testing information is analyzed; for example, looking at errors is important. Tests don't specifically measure a learning disability—the evaluator infers the nature of the disability. Finally, getting a

diagnosis doesn't tell you what to do.

Different kinds of tests

Intelligence/Cognitive

Intelligence tests are composed of a number of sub-tests. The WISC (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-IV) is an example of this kind of test, as is the Woodcock-Johnson. The WISC tests verbal abilities (such as vocabulary, comprehension, and similarities), perceptual reasoning (such as block design and picture concepts), working memory (the ability to hold information in mind while working), and processing speed (the ability to scan data). In general, verbal tests measure left brain function, perceptual reasoning tests measure right brain function, and working memory and processing speed tests measure executive and frontal lobe function. The WISC, used with kids 6–16 years old, is designed to assess developmental abilities with no adjustment for grade level.

Information Processing/Neuropsychological

Neuropsychological testing looks at why a child performs the way he/she does on a test. An evaluator using these tests or this lens is thinking about behavior with the brain in mind. A big part of this type of assessment is a cognitive IQ test; other tests like the Wisconsin Card Sorting test, which assesses the rate of learning, strategies, and the ability to deal with arbitrary information, are also included in a neuropsychological evaluation. Neuropsychological tests can help diagnose the neurological organization of the brains, but these tests don't provide a direct diagnosis—doctors, using information from these tests, do the diagnosing.

Executive functions refer to the skills required to execute complex

tasks from beginning to end. These functions include planning, organization, setting goals, self-monitoring, self-correction, and the ability to inhibit responses not on task. Executive functions are not fixed easily, but there is hope, that over time, a child will learn to organize. Intervention is useful and brains do develop; a lot of brain development occurs in adolescence and is palpable in kids with executive function problems.

Neuropsychological tests are good at telling what's wrong but they aren't good at detailing the implications or telling schools what to do with a student. These tests are helpful when we don't know what is going on or a student's progress isn't what is expected. The downsides to neuropsychological testing are that they are expensive and time-consuming.

Other Tests

Other tests include academic tests, language tests, and projective tests. Academic tests include reading short passages, spelling, math computations, and "written" language. If a child has expressive language problems, an evaluator may see problems in this sort of assessment. Language tests examine vocabulary and syntax knowledge. Projective tests assess emotional functioning. The tests include storytelling tests and ink blots.

How to interpret tests

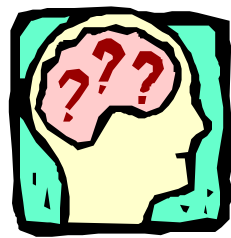
There are several considerations to take into account when looking at tests scores:

- What was the child asked to do?
- What aspect of the task was challenging for the child?

- Are the test requirements parallel to classroom requirements? (One-on-one testing is not similar to the classroom environment and the evaluator can miss attention issues.)

- How does this test score compare with scores on other tests?
- How does this test score compare with previous scores?

Tests are almost always scored so that the child's score is compared to age (in general, scores based on grade level are not good scores). All things being equal, kids should perform at the same level on every test and an evaluator is looking for statistically- and clinically-significant differences between



the tests. Defining a disability is not dependent on whether a kid is performing at an average level on the tests, as a child can have a disability but still perform well academically. One question to ask is if the child is accomplishing up to his or her potential given the disability. A 504 disability is defined compared to the average human being.

It is rare for kids to lose skills over time. Testing several times over the years can be used to measure effective progress (classroom grades are not as good a measure of effective progress). Classroom grades tend to emphasize content while tests measure skills. Teachers' reports can also be helpful in evaluating effective progress.

Questions

- Should the tests be given with or without medication? If a student is on medication then an IQ test should be given while the student is on medication.
- Who should do the testing? There are advantages and disadvantages

to being tested by a team that the student knows. Kids don't stress when a familiar team administers the test but for the most part, kids are compliant even with unfamiliar evaluators.

- Are there kids that can't be tested? Children with PDD, emotional problems, or social problems can be difficult to test but Ms. Axelrod finds the child you can't test is the exception, not the rule.

What is the responsibility of school when a child has problems with social functions? If the child doesn't have a disability, there is no IEP. There are no quantitative measures of social functioning and social functioning won't be picked up by the testing. If the child has a social functioning disorder, then the school is responsible for interventions.

-- Stephanie Woerner

Education Funding in Massachusetts

On February 18, 2004, the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents, the Massachusetts Association of School Committees, the Massachusetts Municipal Association, the Massachusetts Teachers Association, and the Massachusetts Federation of Teachers released a report detailing some of the effects of inadequate funding of education in Massachusetts. The full report, entitled "Progress in Jeopardy: Schools Lose Teachers and Programs and Increase Class Sizes" can be read online at <http://www.massteacher.org/news/headlines>. Some highlights include:

- Over the past two years, the state has reduced spending on public schools and local aid by \$527 million.



- The net loss of teachers in the 187 districts featured in this report between last year (fiscal year '03) and this year was nearly 1,400. Extrapolating those figures state wide, school districts are operating with an estimated 2,160 fewer teachers this year, or 2.8 percent of the state's 77,000 teachers.
- Some districts are relying on parental fundraising to sustain basic educational services. For example, Arlington laid off all seven elementary school reading specialists and was only able to rehire them for the current year after parents raised more than \$250,000 to pay their salaries.
- All districts relying on state MCAS remediation funds were affected when that line item was cut by 80 percent, from \$50 million to \$10 million.
- **Many districts reported instituting new fees for services or increasing old ones. Common charges are for transportation, athletics, instrumental music and full-day kindergarten.** Melrose now charges \$2,050 for full-day kindergarten, \$275 per high school sport with no family cap and \$125 per student for instrumental music.
- The losses detailed in the survey are not surprising, given the magnitude of the state budget cuts during the last two years. According to a recent study by Prof. Andrew Reschovsky of the University of Wisconsin, Massachusetts reduced real state per-pupil spending on local public schools by a greater percent — **14.3** — than any other state during that period. The national average was 4 percent.

In a related development, on April 26, 2004, Suffolk Superior Court Judge Margot Botsford issued a 356-page ruling in the *Hancock vs. Driscoll* case. The plaintiffs in this lawsuit were 19 Massachusetts school districts (Barnstable, Belchertown, Brockton, East Bridgewater, Fitchburg, Gill-Montague Regional, Holyoke, Leicester, Lowell, Lynn, Mashpee, Orange, Revere, Rockland, Sandwich, Springfield, Taunton, Uxbridge, and Winchendon), which sought to prove that the state of Massachusetts is not sufficiently funding education and should adopt a new funding formula that meets constitutional mandates cited in the landmark *McDuffy vs. Secretary of Education* case in 1993. Judge Botsford ruled that despite education reform, students in the plaintiff districts are not receiving the education to which they are constitutionally entitled. Her recommendations have been submitted to the Supreme Judicial Court, namely that the Court should direct the Commonwealth to (1) determine the actual cost of effectively educating children in the plaintiff districts according to the state's curriculum frameworks, (2) determine the costs of providing effective leadership in the these districts, and (3) implement funding and administrative changes. It is not clear at this time how Judge Botsford's ruling will affect students in towns outside the 19 named in the lawsuit, or what the further actions of the Supreme Judicial Court will be.

-- Amanda Green



Interactions Between Police and Persons with Autism

Dennis Debbaudt is a man on a mission. Debbaudt, who is a private investigator and has a young adult son with autism, travels around the country educating police officers on how to respond appropriately to persons with autism. Debbaudt's favorite "catch phrase" for his mission is "Avoiding Unfortunate Situations." Unfortunate situations are what happens when neither the autistic person nor the police officer understand how to interact with the other. Debbaudt approaches his problem systematically. Both the law enforcement officers and the autistic individuals need to be educated in order to improve the quality of their interactions.

For families with children who are "elopers" or "runners," Debbaudt suggests contacting local law enforcement, fire, and ambulance agencies and giving them a profile of their child, including a photograph, method of communication, a description of the child's favorite attractions and locations where they may be found, and any other identification (such as medic alert jewelry). Debbaudt notes that children with autism are often attracted to water sources, such as swimming pools or ponds, which pose a drowning risk. He also suggests that families of elopers make sure that neighbors recognize their child and have some understanding of their risky behaviors. If elopement from the home is persistent, the family may need to contact a professional to install appropriate locks, alarms, or other types of mechanisms that would deter the child from escaping unnoticed.

Debbaudt also offers suggestions **for persons with autism** who are

able to navigate the community without assistance but who are still at risk for a negative interaction (because of their inability to read social cues, difficulty reporting accurately on their own actions or intentions, etc.). Debbaudt says that these individuals need to be taught several key things about their initial contact with the police: not to flee or make sudden movements, and to remain calm; if possible, to make the police aware that the person has autism (either verbally or by using a pre-printed information card). He also advises that persons with autism who are able to be independent nonetheless carry with them the number of an advocacy organization or personal advocate, relative, or friend.

Because of their inability to read social cues and accurately assess the intentions of others, persons with autism who go independently into the community also need to take extra precautions against becoming victims of criminal activity. Debbaudt provides useful tips for reducing this risk, including staying with a familiar group, avoiding inappropriate eye contact with strangers, and making sure to let someone else know your travel plans.

Much of Debbaudt's time is spent educating law enforcement officers. Before law enforcement responders (police, fire, and emergency medical) can begin to modify their interactions with a person with autism, they have to be able to recognize them. So, Debbaudt paints a detailed picture of the many possible clues that may indicate that a person has autism. This also can help the law enforcement officer have a better understanding of why the person with autism may be reacting in an unconventional manner (for example, failing to observe norms for personal space, perseveration on a

topic or echolalic responses, poor eye contacts, etc.). From there, Debbaudt proposes a variety of modified responses that the law enforcement officer can use to improve the interaction. He recommends that they use short, direct phrases, allow for delayed responses to questions or directions, and consider using sign language, pictures, or phrase books if communication seems seriously impaired. They must remember that poor eye contact does not signal deceit or disrespect. Debbaudt also mentions that it is important to evaluate the person with autism for injury, as they may not show any signs of pain, even when badly hurt. Finally, Debbaudt stresses that if law enforcement officers take an individual into custody who they remotely suspect has an autism spectrum disorder, that they keep them separate from the general incarcerated population, to protect them from risk of abuse or injury.



When I heard Dennis Debbaudt speak (at the Southern Norfolk County ARC), he had just spent the day teaching Norfolk County law enforcement officers. Spreading the word and training the law enforcement community in more communities must be a priority of all families with at-risk children. Debbaudt maintains an informative web site – <http://www.inlv.demon.nl/avunsi/> – which provides access to his article in the April 2001 FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, plus other information from his workshops and a recently published book, Autism, Advocates and Law Enforcement Professionals: Recognizing and Reducing Risk Situations for People with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

-- Helen Golding

Farewell... Amdanda



When Amanda Green first announced that she was "considering" stepping down from her position as co-chair of the BSEAC, I began dreading writing a farewell letter, and because I am a bit of a procrastinator, I kept putting off even *thinking* about it, much less actually *doing* it. Like many of us, I first met Amanda at a BSEAC meeting. I believe it was the first one she attended after moving here from New Jersey; I know it was my first one. I came away from that meeting with two impressions: 1) I can't/don't/won't believe my child has a disability and 2) Who the heck is this amazingly articulate, knowledgeable, passionate woman?

Jump forward a few years and as I began attending more BSEAC meetings and dealing with the aforementioned # 1 issue, I found that I was also beginning to get a bit more of a clue to that second one. Over the past four years, I have been in the BSEAC support group with Amanda; we have attended conferences and workshops together; worked on newsletters; met with other groups in town to discuss common themes and issues; had countless phone calls and have sent even more emails; shared a mutual passion for books; discussed the best movies to watch while folding laundry and, of course planned, planned, planned for the BSEAC.

To those three traits I first noticed, I have been able to add: humorous; organized (we've all seen that binder); patient; an amazing writer (well, we've all read her articles and many emails); sympathetic; formidably intelligent; navigationally challenged (don't drive with her

unless YOU know where you are going); compassionate; meticulous (don't ask her to edit something unless you are prepared to deal with your errors) and, above all, encouraging. She is able to zero in on the strengths of not only the children with differences and disabilities but also their parents; she sees the inherent worth of everyone and even more importantly, reinforces and encourages ones belief in oneself . She is a trusted friend, a true collaborator and one who believes in inclusion for all. She will be sorely missed.



-- Laurie Graham

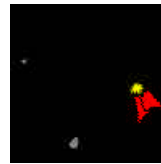
BSEAC Appreciation Awards -- a New Tradition

With over one hundred twenty people in attendance, the Belmont Special Education Advisory Council held its first annual BSEAC Appreciation Awards recognition ceremony this past Thursday, at the Chenery Middle School. The evening was a celebration of the many caring, skilled, and dedicated teachers, administrators, and other members of the community that make a positive difference in the lives of children with special needs.

In her introductory remarks, BSEAC co-chair Amanda Green noted that the word "special" in special education applies both to the children involved and to the special people that work so hard to enrich their lives. With respect to the children, she commented, "This night is about *special* education – education that is called "special" because these children are different from other children. To

make no bones about it, they require more attention, creativity, patience, and just plain hard work than other children do. Their beauty is of a *special* nature, often more hidden and subtle and harder to see than that of other children." Addressing the special contribution of the award recipients, she continued, "The effort you expend on even a single child is a stone thrown into the pool of that child's life, creating ripples of self esteem and cascades of confidence that build and travel forward, and strengthen that child all through his or her life."

After introducing each of the 60 honorees, Ms. Green, along with co-chair Laurie Graham, read a short statement of appreciation submitted by the parent of a child receiving special education services in Belmont. As the co-chairs noted on numerous occasions, although the words of praise were written by a single parent, in virtually all cases there were many other parents who echoed the positive sentiments in these statements.



Leading off the list of honorees was Dick Allen, who is retiring at the end of the year. In his 27 years at Belmont High School, Dick was a mentor and inspiration to an entire generation of students in special education. Other honorees included (in alphabetical order): Susan Alper, Selina Anderson, Terry Bell, Ann Berndt, Heather Blake, Alex Boudette, Barbara Cafarelli, Laurie Carlson, Carolyn Caswell, Colleen Cox, Debbie Dayton, Christina Fedolfi, Dr. Rose Feinberg, Cliff Gallant, Alison Goulder, Amanda Green, Peg Hamilton, Kathy Hogan, Sara Houk, Jamie Huguet, Dave Hursh, John Kearney, Peter Kimball, Marshall Levy, Kathy Lind, Maura Lyons, Cindy Malia, Linda Maranian, Jillian Marcucci, Michael McAllister, Barbara McBride,

Shelagh Meier, Jo-Ann Miller, Meghan O'Neil, Vicki O'Regan, Jeff Perras, Rosemary Peterson, Katherine Platt, Sara Pollono, Joseph Quinn, Paul Quinn, Ellen Quirk, Nicole Rockland, Dick Samaria, Lauren Moran Santeusanio, Sally Smith, Nancy Smock, Lauren Speisman, Jess Stevens, John Sullivan, Vicky Sutton, Stacey Szeidler, Helen Tassone, Sue Tudisco, Adele Wilson, Eileen Winslow, Ali Wolters, and June Yacubian. As Ms. Green also noted, "[the] list of honorees is not exhaustive. There are many other people who work in the Belmont Public Schools and who live in our community who make a positive difference in the lives of our children every day."

Concluding the ceremony, Ms. Graham and the attendees also took a moment to honor Ms. Green, who is stepping down after six years as BSEAC co-chair, and Cindy Pfister, who ended her five years as co-chair in June 2003. Under their leadership, BSEAC has expanded its monthly informational meetings, worked collaboratively with the School Department on a wide range of special education issues, and disseminated information to the broader school community to advance the understanding, acceptance, and inclusion of persons with disabilities. Anyone interested in learning more about BSEAC may contact Laurie Graham, Co-Chair, at 617-489-6483

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