

# BSEAC TRANSITIONS COMMUNICATIONS

The Newsletter of the Belmont Special Education Advisory Council

Welcome to the first BSEAC Connections of the 2002-2003 school year. Amanda Green and Cindy Pfister, BSEAC co-chairs, have, again, gathered an interesting and informative roster of speakers to address our group. Inside this issue you will find our calendar, a letter from Ed Orenstein and minutes from the September 25th and May 9th meetings, In addition, there's an interview with Bruce McDonald, principal of Daniel Butler elementary school, a write-up of a BSEAC Vision meeting conducted in early September and a article addressing the importance of a rich sensory diet for many childrenwithdisabilities.

Please send any suggestions regarding the newsletter to the editor (that would be me!) Laurie Graham, 617.489.6483 or iamlaurieg@yahoo.com.

Don't forget to check out the volunteer opportunities -- help make our organization bigger, stronger and more visible in the community!!

## BSEAC VISION MEETING - submitted by Helen Golding

On September 17th, a group of BSEAC members gathered to continue the process of (1) updating the organization's mission and goals, and (2) finding ways to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization, including providing for transitions in BSEAC's leadership. The matter of leadership transition led off the meeting, as Cindy Pfister, long-time BSEAC co-chair, announced that the 2002-2003 school year would be her last a BSEAC co-chair. Cindy also serves as the organization's treasurer, a job that will need to be filled as the organization seeks to raise more money to support its activities (more on this below). Laurie Graham, who currently serves as BSEAC's publicity director and newsletter editor, agreed to take on the job of chair of the Disabilities Awareness subcommittee. Ann Reynolds will continue on as FunFest coordinator, but is looking for another person to help with parts of the job that were handled last year by Hope Colen, who is moving from Belmont.

The group also discussed whether to expand fund-raising efforts. In the past, the group has solicited contributions to support the FunFest, but typically only at a level that covers the cost of the event, plus a small margin. Last year, the FunFest coordinator indicated that she felt there was a lot of untapped financial support that BSEAC could go after. At the vision meeting, there was a consensus to authorize the FunFest coordinator to broaden solicitations to expand contributions to BSEAC; these funds could also be used for grants, programming, and other BSEAC activities.

The decision to seek additional sources of funding led to another related discussion, concerning BSEAC's organizational status. Presently, BSEAC does not maintain its own bank account, and as an organization, has never taken the steps necessary to obtain tax-exempt status as a 501(c)(3) organization. Kathy Miller, an attorney and current chair of the School Board, said that incorporating was not a particularly difficult matter. However, she noted that if establishing a BSEAC bank account was the primary objective, we might be able to get the Town to set up an account for us (as it does for various school programs). Kathy agreed to check out some possibilities and advise us further on this matter.

Finally, the group discussed possible changes or refinements in BSEAC's mission, to better reflect the current goals of the group. It was generally agreed that we should expand outreach to the special education community and to the community at large, with the objective of creating a more accepting and supportive environment for our children and our families. The Disabilities Awareness subcommittee has made some good progress toward this goal, but more needs to be done.

Given the broad and ambitious scope of the discussion, it came as no surprise that some matters remain "works in progress." Because long-term leadership is uncertain, it was felt that proceeding slowly would help ensure a smooth leadership transition as well as the longevity of the group. To that end, we will concentrate on re-writing the by-laws, investigating which financial path is best for our organization and will institute an election for the BSEAC leadership. The Vision meeting was certainly a success and helped to educate the group on the many important issues that need to be addressed in order to maintain BSEAC's record of SPED-PAC excellence and prepare us for a successful future.

## BSEAC CALENDAR 2002-2003

**October 23, 2002: Effective Inclusion** We welcome inclusion specialists Ms. Robin Fabiano and Ms. Patricia McDaid from the Newton Public Schools, who will share with us their extensive experience including students with disabilities in regular classrooms at the elementary and middle school levels

**November 20, 2002: What's New in the Belmont Schools?** An exchange with Student Services Director Mr. Ed Orenstein and School Committee members Ms. Donna Griswold and Ms. Deborah Emello about school happenings and current issues.

**December 18, 2002: Emerging Sexuality in Adolescents with Disabilities** Ms. Sally Fogel, a certified sexuality educator, faculty member at Wheelock College, and private therapist specializing in sexuality counseling for people with physical, developmental, and emotional disabilities, joins us to discuss this vitally important but little talked-about topic

**January 15, 2003 (Snowdate 1/22): Basic Rights in Special Education\*\* 7:30-9:30 \*\*** Both for parents entering the special education system and for those of us with a few years' experience, it's hard to keep track of deadlines, paperwork, and regulations. Given recent changes in the law, this workshop presented by the Federation for Children Special Needs comes at an opportune time.

**Sunday, February 2, 2003, 3 - 5 p.m.: Annual Funfest** Come join us at the Wellington School for games, crafts, music, pizza, and just plain fun!

**February 12, 2003: ADHD - What's New in Evaluation and Treatment?** In research on ADHD, developments occur so rapidly it can make your head spin. Dr. Asha Parekh, psychiatrist in charge of McLean's Clinical Evaluation Center and on staff at MGH and Harvard Medical School, will fill us in on the latest research.

**March 19, 2003: Behavioral Intervention:** Does your child have behavioral difficulties at home or in school? Many children with disabilities do. Ms. Lyn Snow, a behaviorist who comes to us from Lesley University's Learning Lab, will guide us through behavioral intervention planning.

**April 9, 2003: Helping Your Child with Communication - Social and Writing Skills:** Does your child have difficulty making and keeping friends? Does your child have difficulty with written communication? Speech therapists Ms. Julie Cyr Gibowicz and Ms. Kim Stillwell provide strategies for parents to help their kids become more fluent in both written and social language skills.

**May 14, 2003: Toilet Issues Throughout Childhood and Adolescence:** If your child or adolescent has motor skills deficits, attention deficits, executive function deficits, or developmental disabilities, there's a very good chance you're coping with an array of difficult issues around toileting. Dr. Kathleen Trainer, from McLean Hospital, will lead us in a problem-solving discussion.

**June 11, 2003: Information and Planning:** Our annual opportunity to reflect on the current school year and plan BSEAC's calendar for the year ahead. A great chance to exchange ideas with Student Services Director Mr. Ed Orenstein and with fellow parents.

*NOTE: Unless otherwise noted, all meetings will be held in the Chenery Middle School Faculty Dining Room on Wednesdays from 7:30-9 p.m.*

## OTHER IMPORTANT EVENTS

**"Out of District Placement: Know Your Rights"** - Andrea Watson, Founder and Project Coordinator for Parents for Residential Reform (PFR) will provide information for parents whose children are in residential/day placements. **Wednesday, Nov., 6, 7-9 Minuteman ARC for Human Services, Concord, MA 01742. RSVP: Liz @ ARC: 978-371-1543, ext. 37**

**"Writing and Using Social Stories"** - A two part workshop that will include an introduction to the techniques of writing social stories. Appropriate for teachers, parents and caregivers of individuals from four years to adult. Presented by Carol Hilliard, M.S.Ed. **Wednesday, Nov. 6 & 13, 7-9. Family Resource Center, EMARC, 20 Gould Street. Reading MA 01867. Pre-register: Kerry Mahoney 781-942-4888 ext. 15. \$20.00 fee for both sessions.**

**"Northeast Family Leadership Series"** - This six day series is dedicated to providing participants with information and methods to increase their advocacy skills. **Nov. 8 & 9, Jan. 24 & 25, Mar. 28 & 29. Contact Susan Nadworny for more information. 781-665-5179. snadw@aol.com. Weekends are free and include meals.**

**"Learning Disabilities Association of Massachusetts Conference"** - A day long conference comprised of several different workshops covering many facets of Learning Disabilities. Many well-known speakers and a "Teen Conference" welcoming 7-12 graders and their parents. **Sat. Nov 2, Curry College, Milton 02186. Register at [www.ldam.org/resources/conferences/html](http://www.ldam.org/resources/conferences/html). Call 781-891-5009 for more information.**

**"Current Trends in Autism 2002"** - This three day conference has a large and comprehensive roster of speakers covering many aspects of Autism. **Nov. 1 - Nov. 3, Westin Hotel, 70 Third Street, Waltham. For more information call 617-414-7012 or [www.ladders.org](http://www.ladders.org).**

**"Tying it Together"** - The 4th Annual Conference on Autism Spectrum Disorders, sponsored by the Autism Resource Center of Central Mass. **Saturday, Nov. 23, Holy Cross College, Worcester. To register call 508-595-9101**

For further listings, please turn to page 8

And don't forget: Join us on Wednesday, November 6th at 7:30 PM in the Chenery Auditorium to hear Nancy Mullin-Rindler speak on the topic: "Bullying and Teasing: What Every Parent Needs to Know." This talk is expected to start a district-wide conversation about bullying and teasing. What programs are currently in place in our schools? What needs improvement? How can parents support teachers? If you are interested in working to address these issues, a sign-up sheet will be available.

This evening is co-sponsored by the Chenery PTO, the Winn Brook, Wellington, Butler, and Burbank PTAs, Belmont Special Education Advisory Council, Belmont Against Racism, and the Belmont Youth Commission.

**SENSORY DIET FOR THE HOME - submitted by Peggy Tryon, parent and Pediatric Occupational Therapist**

I am sure we are all familiar with the restlessness or irritability experienced by ourselves or someone we know, when a daily walk, run, or gym work out is missed. I know I cannot feel fully awake in the morning without a shower and something hot to drink. When I need to sit and write a report, it helps if I have a snack nearby, as well as a quiet environment and music in the background. The next time you are at a meeting, observe how many adults may be chewing on their pens, fidgeting with something in their hands, or sipping something to drink.

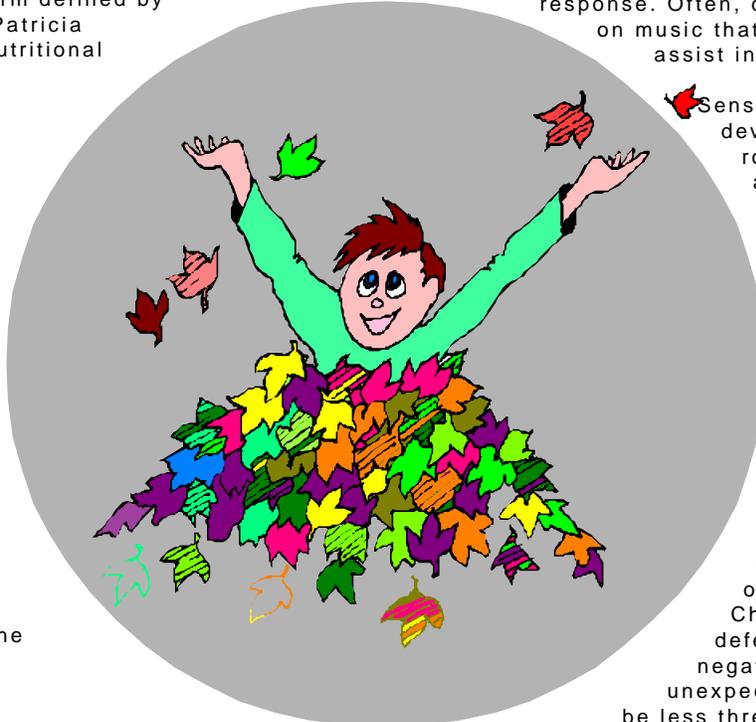
All of these examples demonstrate the concept of a sensory diet. This is a term defined by Occupational Therapist, Patricia Wilbarger. Just as our nutritional diet requires a certain combination of meals and snacks, we also have sensory diet needs. We need certain combinations of sensory input that are timed throughout the day, and involve a level of intensity and duration which allows us to achieve an optimal level of arousal to engage in daily tasks. Similar to the complexity of nutritional needs, determining sensory diet needs is also complex. In this article I will touch briefly on one specific type of sensory input in a such a diet, and how this can be used in the home setting to assist organization and focus.

The concept of sensory diet is important for all of us, though it becomes even more important to understand for individuals who have difficulty in sensory processing. It is important to discuss any concerns or questions you have around sensory diet needs with the Occupational and Physical Therapist working with your child. Certain activities have a more modulating effect on the nervous system. Activities that involve "heavy work" are calming and organizing to the nervous system. This type of input is called proprioceptive input, and refers to the sensory input we receive from our muscles and joints. Activities such as climbing on playground structures, carrying, pushing, or pulling something heavy, play wrestling, or a tug of war game, all provide sensory input to muscles and joints. Activities that involve deep pressure or firm touch are often calming and can assist in promoting organization. Suggested activities which can be incorporated into home/play routines and involve heavy work input are listed at end of this article.

As a parent I have frequently observed that my daughter is more organized and calm after digging and playing in the sand at the beach, swimming, or play wrestling with her Dad. These activities all involve proprioceptive input, which has a modulating affect on the nervous

system. Sensory input to the mouth can be another way to assist in organization and focus. Just as there are "heavy work" activities for the muscles and joints in our body, we can also provide this kind of activity to the muscles in our mouth. This can be achieved by eating certain types of snacks, such as: bagels, carrots, pretzels, chewing bubble-gum, or sipping a milk shake through a straw.

In discussing sensory diet, we also refer to structuring the environment to reduce disrupting stimuli and foster organizing stimuli. For example, at home it may be helpful for a child to have a quiet "hideout" area in his/her room where distractions are minimized. This space could have pillows, mouth toys, or fidget toys for the child to manipulate. Music, smells, lighting, and visual backgrounds can also have effects on an individual's response. Often, dimming lights and/or putting on music that involves rhythmic tones can assist in organization.



Sensory diet also involves the development of consistent routines for daily activities and transitions. A specific movement warm-up before homework, or a deep pressure activity before bedtime are both examples of sensory diet routines that foster an optimal level of arousal. In addition, we need to be mindful of our own interactions in relation to a child's sensory diet needs. Voice quality, tone, and rate of speech can all have an effect on child's level of arousal, as well as the type of touch used in interactions. Children with sensory defensiveness may react negatively to light or an unexpected touch; a firm touch will be less threatening to the child's nervous system. This an important issue when helping family members to understand a child's response, and knowing how to modify their interactions.

In planning sensory diet strategies we need to be detectives. We need to observe our child's behaviors for the types of sensory input they are seeking and find comforting, all the while, observing their responses to different types of sensory input. By working with your child's therapist you can establish ways to help your child meet some of their sensory diet needs as part of daily routines.

I will conclude with an example from my home. As I was writing this, my daughter, Rosie took the bean bag chair and put it on top of her, as she sat on the sofa watching TV. This is an example of seeking deep pressure input. As it was an unstructured day for her — and raining — other opportunities for her to obtain more sensory input had been limited. I am sure she needed this deep pressure input to help her nervous system be more organized. Another activity which would allow her to receive this type of sensory input is the "sandwich game" described below. As a parent I know how difficult it is to "add more things to do" to our schedule.

Often sensory diet activities can be incorporated into play/leisure routines, and can be made available in the child's environment, the goal being to teach them to incorporate this kind of activity into their own daily routines. Being familiar with sensory diet principles can give us another lens to help us understand our child's behavior. Your child's Occupational and Physical Therapist can assist you with understanding specific sensory needs of your child.



Examples of Sensory Diet/ Heavy Work Activities for Home Use: *(Let your child's response be your guide as to those activities which are the most helpful. Don't ask your child to push or carry something which is too heavy.)*

■ **Seasonal Play/Work Activities:**

- Digging in or shoveling snow
- Raking leaves – making a pile and jumping in leaves
- Pulling weeds
- Loading up and wheeling child size wheelbarrow
- Pulling a wagon
- Climbing on playground structures
- Jumping rope
- Swimming
- Digging in sand, carrying buckets of water.

■ **Homework Ideas, try some simple warm ups:**

- Chair push ups - child holds onto sides of chair, lifts bottom off chair - try for 10X
- Push palms together and/or push palms on table
- Wall pushes - Stand slightly away from wall, have child push against wall with hands
- Have child give himself a hug
- Offer snacks that provide heavy work input to the mouth - bread sticks, bagel, pretzels, bubble-gum.
- Have child use a water bottle or suck through straw for drinking.
- Make hand fidget toys available for hand use in between tasks or while thinking. For example: squeeze balls, tangle, putty.
- Experiment with different kinds of background music while doing homework.
- Use rhythm to help learn math facts, spelling words

■ **Household chores:**

- Carrying bags
- Pushing of carrying laundry basket
- Wiping off table with sponge
- Pushing chairs under table
- Taking out garbage

■ **Games and Activities:**

- Sandwich game - Make "sandwich" by having child lie between 2 or more cushions. Gently add pressure as you pretend to put on condiments
- Play Steam Roller - Have child lie on floor; roll large ball over length of child's body with consistent pressure comfortable for child. Do similar activity with paint roller - pretend to paint child different colors.
- Work with resistive material - modeling clay, putty
- Cooking activities which involve stirring, rolling, kneading dough.

**Most of all....have fun!**

*References:*

*Wilbarger, P. (1995, June) The Sensory Diet: Activity Programs Based On Sensory Processing Theory. Sensory Integration Special Interest Section Newsletter # 18, 1-4.*

**COMMENTS FROM ED ORENSTEIN ,  
DIRECTOR OF STUDENT SERVICES**

As a result of the thoughtful preparation of many teachers and administrators, we have experienced a smooth beginning of the school year. I welcome the following staff members to their new positions:

**Jenny Nichols**, Preschool Teacher at Winn Brook School. Previously, Jenny was a LABBB Collaborative teacher at Butler School.

**Karen Rose**, Preschool Teacher at Winn Brook School. Karen had been a long-time professional aide and specialized technology consultant in Belmont.

**Kim French**, Resource Teacher at Burbank School. Kim's career change led her to the Lesley University/ Brookline Public Schools collaborative internship program.

**Kathleen Dailey**, Resource Teacher at Chenery Middle School. Kathleen had been with the Boston Public Schools.

**Michelle Sierota**, Resource Teacher at Chenery Middle School. Michelle joins us from Providence College.

**Alison Thalmann**, Resource Teacher at Belmont High School. Alison comes to Belmont from Burlington High School in Vermont.

**Katina Lawdis**, Occupational Therapist. Katina joins us with experience in a number of public school systems, most recently Walpole.

**Jillian Marcucci**, Occupational Therapy Assistant. Jillian joins us from the Lincoln Public Schools.

**Ellen Goldshine**, LABBB Collaborative Teacher at Butler. Ellen comes to Belmont from the University of Delaware.

**Brenda Souza**, LABBB Collaborative Teacher at Butler. Brenda was a resource teacher at Chenery last school year.

**PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS:**

The Thom Charles River Early Intervention (EI) Team is using space at Winn Brook. This will aid in Belmont student transitions to our preschool program and enhance collaboration with EI.

- .. A fourth half-day integrated preschool class has been added at Winn Brook to accommodate increasing student need. Peg Hamilton and Sally Smith have developed a Social and Pragmatic Language Skill Development Group at Winn Brook. Autistic students participate in this after- school program to enhance their language and social skills.
- .. Community and School Based Programs (CASP) support from the Walker School continues at Wellington and Chenery for students with serious emotional disabilities and behavioral challenges. Mindy Davin, social worker, provides assistance and consultation to students, teachers, parents, administrators, and others.
- .. A third teaching position was created for the LABBB Collaborative Program at Butler due to the increase in significance of student disabilities. Ellen Goldshine and Brenda Souza team-teach in the K-2 classroom.
- .. The Minuteman Regional High School Committee has approved a LABBB Collaborative proposal to purchase land on Minuteman property to build a small alternative high school. The LABBB Board will be dealing with procedures and plans throughout the school year.

**INCLUSION STUDY GROUP**

- .. Because curriculum becomes increasingly complex and difficult for some students to access in grades 7 and 8, Dr. Holland has formed a study group to review the inclusion process for students with significant disabilities in these grades. Ray Bohn, consultant, is assisting the group in designing a survey regarding grade 7 and 8 curriculum access issues. I will keep you informed.

**FEDERAL SPECIAL EDUCATION NEWS**

- .. President Bush's Commission on Excellence in Special Education released its report, A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and their Futures, in July. You can download via the Massachusetts Department of Education web site at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/>. Recommendations include accountability for high expectations with disabled students, additional federal funding for special education, reduction of paperwork and the regulatory burdens, simplifications and clarification of special education eligibility, early intervention services, improved research and enhanced preparation.
- .. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) has not yet been reauthorized. It is reported that Congress will deal with this at a future date by linking IDEA to the Bush Commission report.

**FUNDING**

As you know, federal, state and local funding for education continues to be a major issue. Given gloomy state predictions of funding availability over the next few school years, the entire community will need to collaborate with creative responses to ensure quality education for all students and a fair allocation of available resources.

I plan to continue my active involvement with the Massachusetts Administrators of Special Education with advocacy for students with disabilities, funding, and policy making.

I welcome your thoughts, ideas or concerns.

Ed Orenstein  
 Director of Student Services  
 617-484-3586  
 eorenstein@belmont.k12.ma.us

**VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!!**

A few good folks are needed to help out in the following capacities:

**HELP RE-WRITE**

**OUR BY-LAWS.** This is one of the tasks facing the Council. Come wear your organizational hat and help us strengthen the group.

**PARENT/PTA LIAISONS.** We need parent reps for Wellington and Butler. You will need to send information regarding schedules to each PTA for inclusion in newsletters and, if you attend PTA meetings, let others know what is current with the BSEAC.

**TREASURER.** We are not talking CFO level here, just someone who can help us keep the books, pay the bills, etc.

**WRITE ARTICLES OR BOOK REVIEWS.** My personal favorite -- I am lazy, help out by writing an article or a brief book review of an interesting new title for this newsletter!

**JOIN THE DISABILITIES AWARENESS GROUP.** This subcommittee re-gathered last year and worked on getting collaborative support for the Preventing Teasing and Bullying' presentation on Nov. 6th. We will be looking for other ways to promote tolerance and understanding in schools and the larger community.

Please contact Amanda Green (617-484-2218 or [amanda.green@earthlink.net](mailto:amanda.green@earthlink.net)) if you are interested in helping out in any of these important areas.



**SEPTEMBER 25 MEETING: MCAS  
Students with Disabilities - submitted by  
Sue Morris**

On September 25, Karen Dobak spoke with BSEAC members and others about the MCAS and students with disabilities. Dobak is a paralegal at Boston Legal Service representing people with disabilities for Social Security and other programs; more importantly, she is the mother of a 9-year-old boy with Aspergers Syndrome attending the Walker School in Needham. Dobak's focus is protecting students with disabilities so that MCAS testing is done in a nondiscriminatory manner. According to federal law, all students — including those with disabilities — must take the MCAS. Students in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade must pass the MCAS in order to graduate. Students with disabilities who fail the MCAS in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and continue to fail retests, are eligible for special education until age 22.

In 2001, 53% of 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students with disabilities failed the English Language Arts portion of the MCAS; 62% failed the math portion. Of students who took the Alternate Assessment, (portfolio), almost all failed. These failure rates illustrate that many children with disabilities do not receive the same education as their nondisabled peers, nor do they receive necessary accommodations for taking the test. Even if accommodations for taking the test are in the student's IEP, these accommodations aren't always followed through when the actual testing occurs.

Only 2% of children with disabilities do not meet state standards for students because of cognitive problems. **In other words, almost all students with special needs should be able to pass the MCAS test IF they receive appropriate accommodations and the same education as their peers, even if it means being tutored after school or receiving other services that may not be readily available in certain school districts.** All students are entitled to "access to the general education curriculum" whether they are included in a regular education environment or in other settings.

Students who fail the MCAS can re-take the test up to four times. If your child fails the MCAS, there is an appeals process, "but it is very strange," revealed Dobak. The only person who can request an appeal is the superintendent of schools; the parent must convince the superintendent to file an appeal on the student's behalf, or the parent can ask the School Committee to force the superintendent to file an appeal.

There are several types of accommodations which can be implemented for students taking the MCAS. Accommodations should be stipulated in the student's IEP. Once the child takes the MCAS, the Team meeting should include a discussion of what the child's scores were and if they were poor, what can be done to improve the scores. In this way, "MCAS scores can be used to help ensure the school district addresses the unmet needs of your child," according to Dobak.

In determining which accommodations are appropriate for your child, first consider what accommodations your child needs in the classroom every day. Those must be in place for MCAS testing as well. Then consider

accommodations they may not need every day but may need for the MCAS, such as breaks during testing periods, physical activity at regular intervals, or special furniture. The accommodations should be spelled out in the student's IEP: i.e., 20 minutes of testing followed by 10 minutes of break. Accommodations are highly individualized and based on the child's needs.

These accommodations fall into several broad categories: **Timing & Scheduling**; what time of day is best, how long can the child work on testing before breaks, **Setting**; where will the test take place, what sort of desk or class-room is needed, **Presentation**; directions of materials read by instructor, Braille or large print, opportunity for movement increased or decreased, **Response**;

calculators, scribes, signs or gestures. "Whatever accommodation the child needs is what they get," said Dobak. If the student passes the MCAS with accommodations, he or she can still receive a diploma. All are allowed even if they are "non-standard." Certain non-standard accommodations include: using a reader, interpreter, "speech to text" conversion, calculator, spell check, or grammar check. Such non-standard accommodations should be provided to students who already receive them in the classroom, but should not replace appropriate and rigorous instruction in subjects being tested.

Students who cannot participate in the standard MCAS even with accommodations should take the alternate, or "portfolio," assessment. In the portfolio, nine pieces of evidence are required for each subject. The alternate assessment is administered over many months (starting in the fall and ending in May). Scoring is based on many factors, including completeness of material submitted; accuracy of student's responses; and the number of settings in which the student worked.

Students with disabilities who fail MCAS in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade and continue to fail re-tests continue to be eligible for special education until age 22.

Ms. Dobak provided some important contact and resource information: To report school violations of laws protecting students- Program Quality Assurance at DOE: (781) 338-3700  
Lack of consensus about Eligibility, IEP Development, Placement or Hearings- Bureau of SPED Appeals: (781) 338-6400  
Rights violations and basic rights information - The Federation for Children with Special Needs: (800)-331-0622; The Disability Law Center: (617) 723-8455; The Children's Law Center: (781) 581-1977; The Mass. Advocacy Center: (617) 357-8431; CARE (A network of parents, educators, students and others concerned about the impact of MCAS testing on students and schools): (617) 864-4810.



**Did you know?** You can see test questions from last year's MCAS. Visit the Mass. Department of Education's web site at [www.doe.mass.edu](http://www.doe.mass.edu).

**ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH: BSEAC  
Meeting May 9, 2002**

Last May, BSEAC parents had the pleasure of hearing Dr. Arnold Kerzner, a Belmont psychiatrist in private practice, speak about adolescent mental health. Based on his 32 years of experience, Dr. Kerzner shared his **"10 Commandments of Parenting Adolescents"**:

- 1) Parent modeling is far more effective than parent lecturing. Don't be a hypocrite. Live the life you want your kids to lead. Model compassion and fairness, give hugs, laugh, take care of yourself.
- 2) Be authentic. If you're not feeling great, give kids the opportunity to take care of *you*, for a change. This shows kids that you trust them.
- 3) Don't ever think you don't understand your teenager. You do. You've been there, and you know your child.
- 4) Give kids the right kind of time – existential time. Hang out with them, with no expectations, no goals. This nourishes their souls.
- 5) Provide fun and silliness.
- 6) Share your vulnerabilities.
- 7) Help them to see there's a larger community than just their little sphere. Give them a world view. This gives them a sense of perspective.
- 8) Promote resilience. Always show you're constantly trying to resurrect yourself, to not get stuck in depression. This teaches them that we can all survive.
- 9) Talk about the tough subjects: death, God, life, sex.
- 10) Save time for the spiritual. Whatever your belief system is, put it into action in your life and family.

Other pearls of wisdom from Dr. Kerzner:

- Upset because your child fights you? A normal kid will push away a pushy parent. An abnormal kid will let himself be walked on.
- Good news for parents: a child *never* hates her parent, no matter what she says. When kids come to Kerzner's office, they admit their parents drive them crazy, but they also admit they still love them.
- Whatever the parent is struggling with is exactly what the parent will bug the child about. If the parent struggles with memory problems, he'll be all over the kids about grades. If the parent is insecure about her weight, she'll be on her kid's case about eating habits.
- Why do teenagers get angry if you look at them? Teenagers have secrets about everything, and they're afraid you will see all the negative things they think about themselves.

When should parents worry about their adolescent's depression? Normal teenage moodiness can go on for 2 or 3 days, anger for 3 – 5 days. If these go on for 7 – 10 days or more, then you worry. Also keep tabs on how often your child is sleeping and crying. As Kerzner says, "then you become the CIA agent and look for clues about tears in your child's social fabric.... Call the school, counselor, teachers, even your kids' friends' parents. It's even okay to search your child's room if you're very worried." Next, parents should approach their kids. It may take many gently probing conversations to get to the root of the problem; parents need to be persistent and to not be afraid of engaging when kids get emotional. Depression is a neurobiological illness that is 94% curable. Parents need to hang in, consult someone outside the family, and break the cycle.

**BSEAC REACHES OUT TO ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: A talk with Butler  
School Principal Bruce MacDonald -  
submitted by Jennifer Dubost**



Bruce MacDonald has been principal of the Daniel Butler School for the past 11 years, and has been involved in the education of children for 28 years. His varied experience includes having taught Math, Reading, and Science to 3rd through 6th graders in Lexington, working as a curriculum writer at Technical Education and Research Center in Cambridge, and serving as a school principal in Winchester for two years prior to coming to the Butler School.

A situation that is unique to the Butler School is that it is the only Belmont elementary school to host the LABBB program, a collaborative program for more involved special needs children from Lexington, Arlington, Bedford, Burlington, and Belmont. The LABBB program currently has 16 students. Ten students are in the grade K-2 section (with two teachers), and six students are in the grade 3-4 section. This year, the majority of students are from Belmont, as well as a few from Arlington and Burlington. However, in past years the program has drawn students from outside of the collaborative who have come from as far away as Sudbury or Topsfield. The amount of time that LABBB students spend in typical classrooms varies depending on the complexity of individual students academic profiles.

In discussing the challenges faced in supporting the inclusion of special needs children at Butler, MacDonald stressed that parents need to be clear in communicating their overall goals for their child, answering, "What is it that you want to get out of the situation? What are the outcomes that you want?" MacDonald felt that there was a tension created in some situations in trying to balance social and academic objectives within the context of available resources. However, he stated, "Given time and an outstanding staff, we can achieve good outcomes and we find that our efforts are appreciated."

When questioned about the most important aspects of setting up successful programs for children with special needs, MacDonald responded, "the most important aspect is finding quality special needs personnel. Belmont is extraordinarily fortunate in this respect. Unlike many areas in the nation, the Boston area is uniquely blessed with well-qualified special needs personnel. If you don't have qualified people to staff these programs, the best of intentions cannot be met." Secondly, "personnel need to be provided with adequate support to do their jobs. At Butler, an outside consultant is used to help develop individualized reading programs for certain students in LABBB. The consultant returns to reevaluate the students and make adjustments to their programs during the year." Butler has also in the past used an outside consultant to aid children with social skills deficits, but "now we are fortunate in having an in-house, full-time speech/language therapist who can assist us in addressing these issues."

When asked how parents of special needs children can be supportive of him, the teachers, and the specialists, MacDonald said, "Parents need to understand their child's needs within the context of the entire school's needs and programs. This, plus bringing pragmatism and reasonableness to the situation helps greatly in supporting the child and the school. We're all members



of the same community, with a limit as to what we can do for all of our members. All of this costs money, and the school budget is already very thin. It's a lean organization, though still effective, and people need to understand this." In light of this, MacDonald added, "Parents really need to advocate for the system's educational budget. This support will become more critical as the town's financial situation becomes more difficult.

In talking of his experiences in working with special needs children and their families, MacDonald responded, "This has been largely positive. Most people are very reasonable and understanding in determining goals for their child. Every parent wants the best for their child, whether the child has special needs, is felt to be gifted, or is somewhere in between. This school needs to provide for everyone with limited resources. I find it important to balance consideration of the larger picture with that of the individual student. You have to cover all situations with the given budget."

In looking towards the future, MacDonald sighed. "We're just hanging on at this point. I don't see any great increase in financial support coming from the Belmont taxpayer. Indeed the recently arrived tax bill seems to have created a great deal of anxiety across the community. Reduced funding at the Department of Social Services and the Department of Mental Health will throw additional challenges to the school system. Will the Commonwealth be able to continue its current level of financial support? How do we maintain what we have in the face of ever tightening resources? These will be the key questions in the coming years."

**"Parent and Family Support and Education Series"** - Presented by Families First Parenting Programs and Learning Lab @ Lesley University this series of evening workshops is designed to help families support their children's success in school and social relationships. Workshops include: "I Don't HAVE any Homework Practical Strategies for Avoiding Homework Dilemmas" - Tuesday, Oct. 29; "A Relationship to be Concerned About -Impact of Stress on Children with Disabilities" Wednesday, Dec. 4; "Why do they DO that? Understanding Misbehavior in Kids"- Wednesday, Feb 26; "Helping Children Build and Maintain Friendships During the School Age Years" - Tuesday, Mar. 25 and "Transitions: Helping Your Child Get Ready for the end of School and the Summer Ahead" - Tuesday, Apr. 22 **Lesley University, Cambridge - each workshop runs from 7-9 and costs \$20 per person or \$35 per couple. For more information, call 617-349-8575 or email thelab@mail.lesley.edu**

**"2002 TASH Conference"** - This four day disability empowerment conference is sponsored by TASH - The Association for the Severely Handicapped. Join in for strategies and research with over 350 breakout sessions. Special two day pre-conference on "Understanding and Preventing Violence Against People with Disabilities" - Dec 10 &11. **Dec. 11 - 14, Sheraton and Hynes Convention Center, Boston. For registration and a complete agenda: www.tash.org**

**"Judge Baker Children's Center Series"** - This lecture series covers many topics: "The State of the State of Children's Mental Health Care in Massachusetts" - Dec. 4; "Finding a Place: A Motivational Analysis of Being and Belonging Among Youth with Emotional and Behavioral Problems" - Jan. 15. **Room 402, Judge Baker Children's Center, 3 Blackfan Circle, Boston 02115. 9 am - 10:15 am. For more information contact Catherine Fontaine (617-232-8390 or cfontaine@jbcc.harvard.edu**

You are receiving this newsletter via the school mailing list for parents of children with IEPs. This list is confidential...we don't have a database of names. We want to be able to keep you as informed as possible; if you would like to receive post-card reminders of upcoming events or email messages regarding items of interest, please send your name, address, phone and, if you wish, email to: Amanda Green (617-484-2218 or amanda.green@earthlink.net)

**BOOKS FROM THE LIBRARY: A Renewable Resource**

A recent article in the Boston Globe, Sunday October 13, gave information on a growing collection of titles covering a broad range of learning and physical disabilities. The Nickerson Collection is housed in the Bedford Public Library and has been funded by grants from Raymond and Doris Nickerson whose son, Daniel, died in 1985 from a progressive neurological order.

In addition to books, videos and other materials covering disabilities, the library staff has produced a brochure providing information for parents and others to find services and organizations pertaining to specific diagnoses. Meredith McCulloch, library director in Bedford, said that the brochure was written, in part, by a staff member whose own child has a cognitive disability. "Many parents feel lost when they receive a diagnosis, the Nickersons wanted to help provide a resource for anyone going through this process."

McCulloch said that the Bedford Library has sent brochures out to all libraries within the Minute Man Network and is just getting started on contacting Special Education and Disabilities organizations. She emphasized that all titles are available through the regular library network and can be reserved via inter-library loan.

She is sending brochures and title list to the BSEAC (we'll distribute as soon as we get them), and asks that we let them know of titles we think should be added.

You can access their collection via the web: www.bedfordlibrary.net. Click on the Focus Collections link and enter the Nickerson Collection site. It might be worth a trip out to Bedford to visit the library-- its a lovely, large building, with helpful staff. If you have any questions, you can call Meredith McCulloch, library director: 781-275-9440

