



Winter 2005

**From the Co-Chairs' Corner**

*by Helen Golding*

When I stepped forward last spring to offer my name for consideration as co-chair of BSEAC, pretty much all I could think about was how completely unable I would be to fill the enormous shoes of Amanda Green. That feeling hasn't really ever passed. I miss Amanda – both the co-chair and the person – not only for her amazing energy, organization skills, and insights into the many challenges of the special education process, but also for her warmth and her unflinching positive outlook. But I am extremely fortunate to be working with co-chair Laurie Graham, who possesses many of those same wonderful qualities.

Now, on to the purpose of this little blurb. I wanted to report briefly on what Laurie and I have been up to as co-chairs these past few months. First, our biggest job of the year: putting together the calendar of guest speakers for our monthly meetings. Each year, the co-chairs try to put together speakers on a broad range of topics, to address the interests of parents whose children are many different ages, with different types of disabilities, and thus different educational, emotional, and physiological challenges. We recognize that not every speaker will be of interest to every parent, but we hope that there are at least a few programs each year that any particular parent will find of interest. Traditionally, the co-chairs solicit ideas for speakers at the June meeting, in anticipation of preparing the next year's calendar – but your ideas are welcome at any time!

Laurie and I also meet every other month (approximately) with the Director of Student Services, Sally Smith, to trade ideas about ways to improve special education in Belmont. Please let us know any general areas of interest or concern (not child-specific) that you would like us to share with Sally in our upcoming meetings.

At one of our meetings, we were joined by Patric Barbieri, director of the LABBB Collaborative, to discuss changes that have occurred at the Chenery LABBB program and possible ways to make LABBB kids feel more a part of the Chenery community. Our October meeting led to a coffee/discussion session with new high school principal, Jonathan Landman, and Sally Smith, where parents raised a wide range of concerns about the experiences of these children in special education at Belmont High School. The session drew a large crowd, including many parents who have not participated in regular monthly meetings. This spring, we plan to repeat the special program that BSEAC has sponsored for several years concerning planning for college.

We also are committed to continuing outreach to parents of young children just entering the public school system. Tamar

Lewis has worked with Nancy Smock, Preschool Liaison, to make certain that parents of preschoolers know about BSEAC and its activities; she also organized this year's first BSEAC-sponsored afternoon at KidSpace, one Sunday afternoon in late November.

Finally, as you may have noticed, this first newsletter of the year is coming out later than in previous years. This is primarily because we have fewer newsletter volunteers this year. Thanks to Denise Allen for stepping forward to be our editor and to all of you who have taken notes at meetings. We could still use a few writers to do interviews, book reviews, articles on topics of interest to BSEAC members, updates of Internet resources relating to disabilities, and the like. Please contact either me or Laurie to volunteer! Happy New Year to you all.



## **IDEA 2004 Passes After a Long and Difficult Process**

*By Helen Golding*

After long negotiation, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) was signed into law in December. The law takes effect on July 1, 2005. So, what does IDEA 2004 do? It's hard to do justice to the details of this bill in a short article, and there are some good, more detailed treatments available online (referenced at the end of this article). Many details are still to be worked out – in DOE's regulations and in the process of implementing the law. Here are several key areas:

**IEPs:** The requirement for benchmarks and short-term objectives is only retained for children who receive alternative assessments. For

all other children, what will be required is a "statement of measurable annual goals...including academic and functional goals," and "a description of how the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals... will be measured and when periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual goals (such as through the use of quarterly or other periodic reports, concurrent with the issuance of report cards) will be provided."

**Specific learning disabilities:** The new law changes what the local educational agency (i.e., the Town of Belmont), must do and what it "may" do to determine whether or not a child has a specific learning disability. On the one hand, the LEA is "not required" to take into consideration whether the child "has a severe discrepancy between achievement and intellectual ability" in a particular learning area. However, the LEA "may use a process that determines if the child responds to scientific, research-based intervention as a part of the evaluation procedures." The National Center for Learning Disabilities expresses the view that the "response to intervention" model may help to ensure that children who show signs of failing in early grades get identified more quickly and get the help they need.

**Training/licensing of special education teachers:** The new IDEA states that special education teachers should be "highly qualified" – which certainly sounds like a good idea. However, there's a catch. According to the Council for Exceptional Children, "the language in IDEA attempts to directly tie special educators "highly qualified" requirements to the subject matter requirements for general educators in NCLB with little recognition for the integrity of special educators, special education licensure, the multiple settings in which special educators deliver services, the diverse roles within which special educators function, and the very diversity of the individuals for whom they work." There's much more! This is complex piece legislation whose impact will take time to be fully understood. The federal Department of Education is now in the process of developing regulations. More extensive information is available on the following web sites:

TASH: <http://www.tash.org/govaffairs/comparison.htm>

Council for Exceptional Children:

[http://www.cec.sped.org/pp/IDEA\\_120204.pdf](http://www.cec.sped.org/pp/IDEA_120204.pdf)

National Center for Learning Disabilities:

<http://www.ld.org/newsltr/1204newsletr/1204newlang.cfm>

WrightsLaw:

<http://www.wrightsLaw.org>



## **LATE BREAKING NEWS: STATE DOE PROPOSES SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN CHAPTER 766 REGULATIONS**

Related to, but not necessarily required by, the change in federal law, the state Board of Education has proposed some major changes in its regulations for special education. As summarized by Mass. Advocates for Children, these changes include:

**Eliminate requirement that the IEP team determine a child's specific placement:** Under the Board's proposal, an administrator who is not a member of the IEP Team can determine the special education classroom or school for your child outside of the Team meeting process.

**Remove parental consent requirements:** Under the Board's proposal, the school district can change your child's IEP and placement without your consent. You must initiate legal proceedings (a hearing or mediation) in order to maintain your child's last agreed upon placement or services (this severely limits "stay put" rights).

**School districts can refuse to conduct an initial evaluation or re-evaluation:** Under the Board's proposal, the school district can refuse to evaluate or re-evaluate a child who has been referred for an assessment by the parent, teacher, or other professional.

**Allows school districts to place all special education programs together in one part of a regular education school building:** Under the Board's proposal, the Department of Education would establish a process to approve segregation of special education programs in one part of a building (i.e. separate wing, basement).

**Removes measurable short-term objectives from the IEP:** Under the Board's proposal, the IEP would only contain annual goals. Short-term objectives are allowed, (though not required) by the changes to federal special education law and should continue to be required in Massachusetts.

Parents are being urged to review the proposed regulations for themselves, to send comments to their state legislators and the Board of Education (by March 1) and to attend the public hearing on the regulations, to be held February 14 in Malden. More information is available on the Mass Advocates website: <http://www.massadvocates.org>.



## **September Meeting: Organization** *Reported by Anne Smith*

The middle school years are a time of great change – emotionally, socially, physically and academically – according to DeLynn Walker, Belmont parent, secondary school teacher in the Newton Public School system and certified Special Education teacher. Learning shifts from being adult-dependent to child-independent. Not surprisingly, “structure” can greatly aid students and parents through these difficult years.

Families can support a gradual transition to more independent learning at home through practice. When parents do homework with their child, they can try to shift more responsibility to the child, while still being available to offer help and check work. The next step is to encourage even more independent practice, with lots of encouragement.

Organizing the physical area where the student does his or her homework can help, too. A quiet, consistent spot can aid concentration. DeLynn suggests putting together a “toolbox”

of supplies necessary for homework. This should be stored in the homework space, and the contents should be returned to the box after each session. Long-term projects can be housed in a portable file box for easy access and organization. Homework and project lists are a great visual tool, and if your child highlights completed work, then their accomplishments are easy to see.

DeLynn shared several strategies for getting the work done. Simple contracts between parent and child may be suitable: for example, an agreement that the student will complete a project by a particular date and receive an agreed-upon reward. Timers can help break work into doable sessions and also help children understand time value better. In some instances, a team approach to learning may be beneficial. Study buddies, homework groups, upper class mentors, peer tutors, after school sessions with teachers or learning centers may be appropriate. Setting goals and priorities is important. Preparing ahead for the next school day can be another helpful strategy. DeLynn suggests making a nightly check-off chart for the backpack.



## Relationships for Families with Special Needs Children

*Reported by Helen Golding*



On December 14, we were privileged to have as our guest presenter Dr. James Stone, who spoke on the topic of “Family Dynamics.” Dr. Stone is a psychologist with the Wayland Public Schools and, until recently, with the Wellesley Human Relations Service, a community-based counseling organization. Accompanying

Dr. Stone, to talk about her family’s experience with family counseling, was Ellen Sabino, who has a son at Lexington High in the LABBB Collaborative. Dr. Stone spoke about a wide range of experiences, focusing primarily on therapeutic techniques for working with children whose disabilities may make them somewhat harder to reach.

Dr. Stone emphasized it is particularly important to provide these children the room, time and safety to allow them to feel listened to and become at ease with the therapist. Establishing a good relationship – one based on listening and respect – is the foundation of a constructive therapeutic relationship. These children also may need extra time to process questions and formulate their responses, but giving them the extra time often yields to thoughtful and rewarding interactions. Dr. Stone emphasized that people often fall into the trap of focusing on what “needs to be fixed” about these kids, when in fact the most benefit comes from identifying their strengths and using those to help them overcome their challenges.

Dr. Stone’s techniques are exemplified by his work over the past several years with Ms. Sabino’s family. The family began therapy with Dr. Stone when Ms. Sabino’s son was twelve years old. Once Ms. Sabino’s son had established a good relationship with Dr. Stone – initially through play therapy – the rest of the family came to sessions in various combinations to work through some of their problem interactions. Ms. Sabino reflected on the gains that each family member had made from participating in the family therapy. She also said that it was helpful for her special needs son to see everyone in the family participating – so that the therapy did not seem focused solely on him. It was nice to hear such a success story!





## May Meeting: Managing Executive Function Disorder and ADHD at Home

Reported by Stephanie Woerner

The following is a summary of our May 2004 meeting, which drew nearly 200 people! The speaker was Sarah Ward, MS, CCC/SLP ([swardtherapy@aol.com](mailto:swardtherapy@aol.com)).

### Goals of this Talk

1. Identify commonly used terms and the relationships between those terms
2. Define the executive functions and discuss the link between them and language
3. Offer some nitty-gritty functional ways to deal with executive function disorders and ADHD

### Description of Processing Problems

Kids with executive function disorder and ADD/ADHD:

- Are poor judges of the passage of time
- Find transitions difficult
- Attend, on average, to 4 pieces of information at a time (neurotypical kids can attend to 7 +/- 2 pieces of information)
- Have weak attention capacity and poor working memory
- Tend to remember one detail at a time
- Find it difficult to distinguish the main idea
- Have an inability to generalize

These kids may have very sophisticated language but need to be taught to integrate discrete information into concepts (store pieces of information together and then link those pieces together as a concept). Once the concepts are in short-term memory (rather than working memory), they hold onto them.

### Information Storage and Organization

Information is stored in the brain, much like a filing cabinet stores files. Types of stored knowledge include:

- Figural knowledge -- Ability to distinguish shapes, figures, relationships, and meaning of shapes
- Symbolic knowledge -- Ability to take individual symbols and integrate them together into a meaningful unit
- Social knowledge -- Ability to distinguish what is socially appropriate, pick up social cues, and learn the rules of social language
- Semantic knowledge -- Ability to send information to the brain in an organized fashion, know the meaning of words and facts, infer concepts from features, and intuit ways of acting but be flexible in varying the details

(See figure 1, page 7 for further information)

### Executive Functions

Executive functions are the “control” functions, enabling people to behave in ways that go beyond actions based on routine, instinct, habit, or impulse along. The executive systems generally regulate language, covert cognitive behavior, and overt social behavior; well-developed executive functioning helps a person inhibit impulsive behavior, consider other people’s perspectives, take into account the learned rules of social appropriateness, and forgo immediate gratification in the interest of long-term gains. The executive functions of the brain do the things a successful CEO does in a company: set goals and implement plans to achieve those goals, taking into account past experience.

A key goal for kids with executive function disorder and ADD/ADHD is to teach them to generalize. We give oral directions to kids all the time, often just as a list, and this overloads and over-stimulates these kids.

### Strategies

An executive function approach, giving information with a skill set attached to it can be a useful strategy:

1. Teach the child to **Read the Room**. Ask the child to:
  - **Look** at what other people are doing: Are they busy? Do they understand you? **Listen** to what other people are saying.
  - Look at the **Clock**: Is the time right for the activity?
  - Look at the **Space**: What’s in the space, the room?

Now “**Look, Clock, Space**” is linked together into a concept called Read the Room. Saying “Read the Room” becomes a signal that the child should stop and take stock of the surroundings and the time to make sure that his/her actions are appropriate at that time. Labeling the skill set as it is being taught is important. It’s an investment of time, taking a couple of days to implement, but it does work. (The fire safety slogan “Stop, Drop, and Roll” is another example of this approach. It is easy to remember and it tells you exactly what to do if your clothes catch fire.)

2. Teach the child to **forecast how long things will take**. Associate time with something else; for example, X is about the time that it takes for a commercial to run. Ask the child how long he/she thinks it will take to do something, such as cleaning up a room. Break down “cleaning up a room” into chunks like “How long will it take to put the dirty clothes in the hamper?” and “How long will it take to pick up the books?” Try to create a measurable, memorable time unit, for example “Happy Hippopotamus.” Putting dirty clothes in the hamper might take 5 “Happy Hippopotamuses.” Ask the child what could distract him/her along the way. **Give a Direction, Predict the Distraction**, and ask the child to **Do the Action**.

3. **Use language to tap into the frontal lobe functions**. Use words like “Let’s make a *plan*.” Appealing to the emotions taps into the sub-cortex. Instead **Stop, Ask** for what you want, **Wait** for an answer, give a structure or a **Plan**.

4. **Use a planner** to help teach the passage of time. Enter everything in the planner including appointments, errands, practices, fun activities, homework, chores, and dinner, and put times down for each activity. Ask the child “How long?” and “When?” for each activity. This allows the

child to see how much time they have each day for each activity and shows them the passage of time. Adults visualize their day with their day planners and this is a similar exercise.

5. Other useful strategies include:

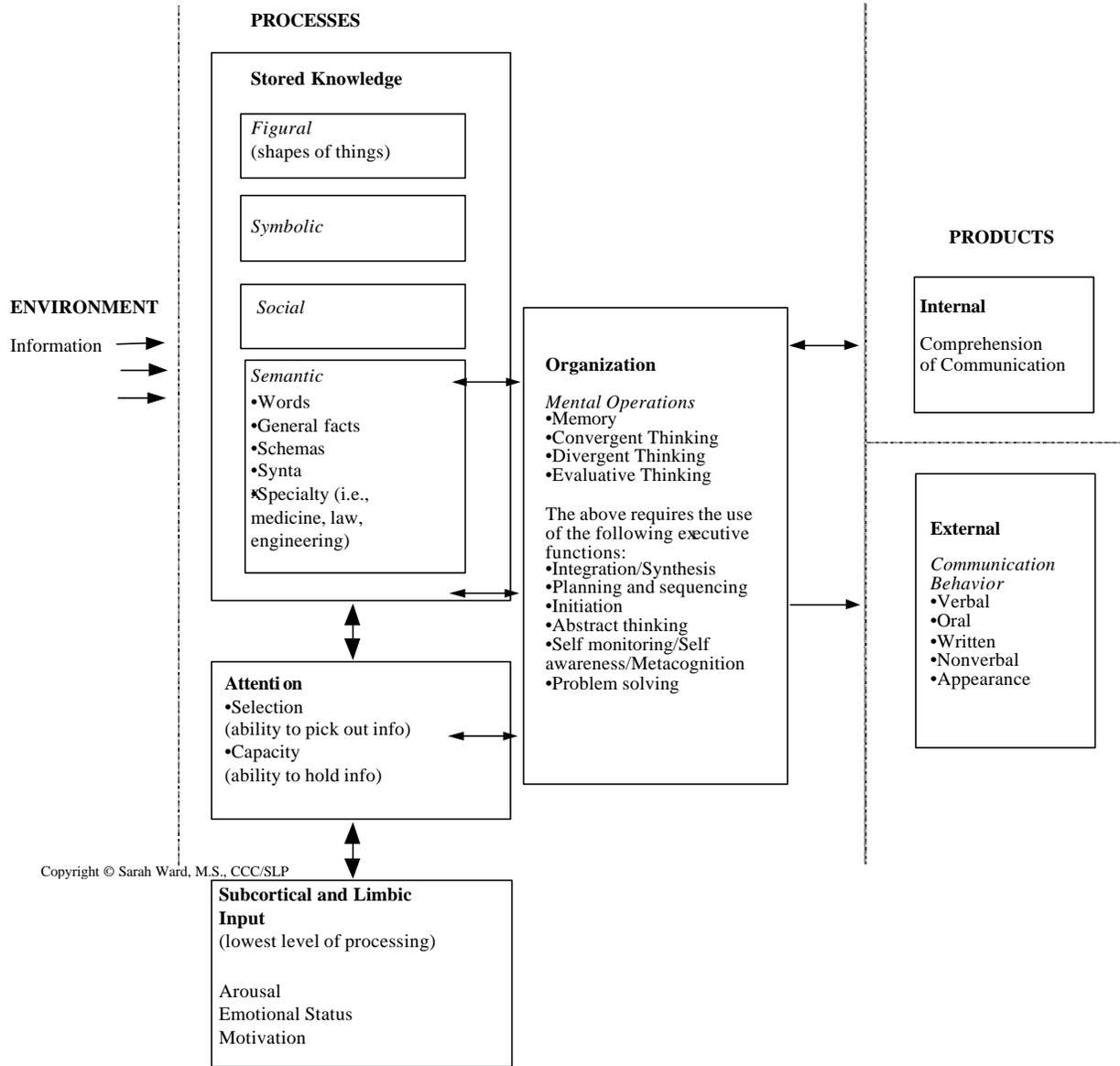
- Use a timer, especially one that shows the time remaining, to give the child a sense of time counting down.
- Be consistent.
- Provide schemas and scripting for the child. Use past experiences as the basis for a schema and label the schema.

Be aware of schemas that can be used to help with schoolwork and teach them. Basic language schemas include:

- **Things:** What kind of thing is it? What is its purpose? Where can you find it? What does it look like? What are its parts? What usually goes with this thing?
- **People:** Names? What are they famous for? Appearance (skin, hair, eyes, body, clothing)? Personality? Talents? Likes/Dislikes? Life Stages? Beliefs? Challenges faced?
- **Animals:** What kind of animal is it? Habitat? Appearance (size, color, fur/feathers/skin, description)? How does it move? What does it eat? Skills? Does it hunt? How does it protect itself? How does it reproduce?
- **Actions:** Reason action is performed? Desired outcome? Who performed? Describe the movement? What object or body part if used? How/where does action start/end? How long does it last? Effect/outcome?
- **Events:** What kind of event is this? Reason for event? Who host? Describe the activities? Anything funny. Interesting or challenging? Objects of symbols associated with the event?
- **Places:** Where is this place? What kind of place is this? What does this place look like (size, geography)? People at this place (how many, type, clothing, culture)? Types of buildings? Animals? Weather of seasons? Anything famous? Food or object found at the place?
- **Ideas/Concepts:** What do all X have in common? How are all X different?

# Managing Executive Function Disorder and ADHD at Home

## Figure 1



*The following is a listing of Special Education Staff in Belmont for the current school year.*

**BELMONT DEPARTMENT OF STUDENT SERVICES  
2004 - 2005**

**2005 EARLY CHILDHOOD LIASON**

Nancy Smock

**PRESCHOOL TEACHERS**

Shannon Girard – Winn Brook  
Christine Joseph – Winn Brook  
Jenny Nichols – Winn Brook

**ELEMENTARY RESOURCE TEACHERS**

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

**INCLUSION SPECIALIST**

Peg Hamilton – Winn Brook, Chenery, BHS

**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPST**

Jessie MacLellan  
Jillian Marcucci – Assistant

**PHYSICAL THERAPIST**

Debbie Dayton

**GUIDANCE COUNSELORS**

Joanna Colton – Winn Brook  
Kristin Flynn – Burbank, Butler  
Monique Chaplin – Wellington  
Carla Hawkins- Chenery (Metco)  
Joe Quinn – Chenery  
Shelia Walsh – Chenery  
Erin McElligott – Chenery  
Jim Brown – High School  
Toby Brown – High School  
Manuela Martin – High School  
Tammy Leary – High School  
Sherry Turner – High School

**MIDDLE SCHOOL SPED TEACHERS**

Michael Bruno  
Rhonda Cherry  
Renee Croak  
Diane Herbst  
Sue Karaczkowski  
Denise LaPolla  
Megan Long

**HIGH SCHOOL SPED TEACHERS**

Alison Lockwood  
Lauren McLaughlin  
Matthew Moynihan  
John Sullivan  
David Turcotte

**SPEECH/LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS**

Alexandra Boudette – Winn Brook  
Megan Dillon – Winn Brook (Pre-School)  
Sue Kemp - Wellington  
Kristin Lester – Wellington, Winn Brook  
Rene Magier – Burbank, Pre-School  
Tina Patsos – Butler, Chenery  
Lisa Rose – Chenery, High School

**MENTAL HEALTH**

Dr. Charlie Brown, School Psych – Butler, Winn Brook  
Efi Fotiadis, School Psych – Chenery  
Dr. John Kearny, School Psych – Burbank, Wellington  
Paula Lazar, School Adjustment Counselor,-HS  
Dr. Eileen Wiznitzer, School Psych, HS

**LABBB COLLABORATIVE TEACHERS/BUTLER**

Cindy Crowley  
Sara Vlasak  
Kate Sacca  
Shelley Johnston, Speech/Language

**SPECIAL EDUCATION EVALUATOR**

Ray Bohn

## **BSEAC Calendar for the Remainder of the 2004-2005 School Year**

*Note: unless otherwise noted, all meetings will be held in the Chenery Faculty Dining Room from 7:30 – 9:00 p.m.*

### **2/13 Annual Funfest**

Come join us from 3-5 p.m. at the Wellington School for games, crafts, music, pizza, Mr. 'S' and lots of fun!

**3/9 Safety** How can parents and family members work with local law enforcement to insure the safety of children with special needs. Belmont Police Chief, Andrew O'Malley, will brief us on how we can work together to implement safety plans for our families and strategies our kids can use when out in the community

### **4/13 Functional Behavioral Assessments**

What are they? What do they mean? How can these assessments be integrated into both the school and home environment to address your child's behavioral issues. Jim Luiselli from the May Institute will guide us through the process.

### **5/11 Chenery Cafeteria: Second Annual BSEAC Appreciation Awards**

Join us as we honor the many people who have made a positive difference in our children's lives. *Our ceremony last year was a huge success and one which we look forward to repeating this year! Start thinking of those whom you'd like to acknowledge. Watch for future reminders and see sample ballot at end of this newsletter!*

### **5/18 Speech and Language Pragmatics**

How can we help our children communicate with others? Belmont speech teacher Lauren Santeusano Moran will teach this workshop focusing on the variety of methods parents can use to foster the development of social language. Also covered will be speech sound development and exercises parents can use at home.

**6/8 Information and Planning** Our annual opportunity to reflect on the current school year, plan BSEAC's calendar for the year ahead and vote for officers. This is a great chance to exchange ideas with Student Services Director Ms. Sally Smith and with fellow parents. Join us for a lively and productive discussion.

#### *Co-Chairs:*

Helen Golding: 617-489-3024 or

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Laurie Graham: 617-489-6483 or

[iamlaurieg@yahoo.com](mailto:iamlaurieg@yahoo.com)

#### *Treasurer:*

Stephanie Woerner: 617-484-5823 or

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*Listerv:* send msg to

[BSEAC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:BSEAC-subscribe@yahoogroups.com)

## **Other Resources and Programs of Interest (non-BSEAC sponsored)**



### **2/9 Children with Challenging Behaviors & Fragile Emotions: What to Know – What to do** The

Learning Lab @ Lesley presents this day-long workshop (8:15 a.m. to 4:45 p.m.) to help participants better understand children's misbehavior and fragile emotions and learn ways to take care of themselves so they have the energy and ideas to help children who are both challenged and challenging. Contact the Lab to register: 617-349-8570, [thelab@lesely.edu](mailto:thelab@lesely.edu) or visit [www.lesley.edu/learninglab](http://www.lesley.edu/learninglab)

### **3/12 Federation for Children with Special Needs: Visions of Community Conference**

This conference will offer up to 30 workshops on issues important to families of children with special needs. Included will be topics on Special Education, health, NCLB, mental health and early childhood. The day long conference will be held at the World Trade Center, Boston. Call the FCSN at 617-236-7110 or visit [www.fcsn.org](http://www.fcsn.org) for more information.

### **4/2 Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress**

This conference features nationally recognized speakers covering such topics as Building Friendships, Facilitating Communication, New Parents, MCAS and a special workshop for siblings. The day long conference will be held at the Worcester Centrum. For more information call 1-800-644-6372 or visit [www.mdsc.org](http://www.mdsc.org)

### **Ongoing – Asperger's Association of New England**

A series of workshops covering a variety of topics pertaining to Asperger's syndrome, PDD, NLD and HFA. Most classes held at AANE's office, 182 Main Street, Watertown. For complete list of workshops call 617-393-3824 or log on to [www.aane.org](http://www.aane.org).

### **Ongoing – Northeast Families Leadership Series**

This series of three, 2-day workshops will help families work to effect change and gain leadership and advocacy skills. Contact Susan Nadworny at Northeast Families Organizing for Change. 781-665-5179 or [snadw@aol.com](mailto:snadw@aol.com)

### **Ongoing – Families First Parenting Programs**

A broad range of parenting, and school-related workshops: including "Positive Approaches to Discipline," "Supporting Children's Friendships" and "Helping Siblings Live Harmoniously". Sponsored by Families First ([www.families-first.org](http://www.families-first.org))



# 2004-2005 Appreciation Awards Announcement

*Has Someone Made a Difference in Your Child's Life?*

On **Thursday, May 11, 2005**, the BSEAC will be hosting its second annual Appreciation Awards evening. As those who attended last year can attest, this was a memorable and meaningful celebration for the nominees, the nominators as well as family and friends attending! Nominations will be accepted for those individuals who have done something special that has made a difference in your child's life. Any family member of a child with special needs in Belmont, whether or not that child has an out-of-town placement, is free to make a nomination. The nominee can be a teacher, friend, neighbor, bus driver, cafeteria worker, coach, etc. All those who are nominated will be recognized.

If you plan to nominate an individual, please consider trying to take a photo of this person working with your child. We hope to have photos which will be part of a display that evening.

Below is a sample of the nomination form. This will be posted on our website: [www.belmont.k12.ma.us/bseac](http://www.belmont.k12.ma.us/bseac) and we will send reminder mailings as well.

**Deadline: April 1, 2005 for Nominations**

Please submit all entries to:

BSEAC  
c/o Laurie Graham  
27 Grove Street  
Belmont, MA 02478

I wish to nominate \_\_\_\_\_ from  
\_\_\_\_\_ for an appreciation award on May 2005.

Please tell us why you believe this person deserves to be recognized for this award.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Submitted by \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_