



December/January 2011

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As the holidays close and we return to our regular activities I want to take this opportunity to share with you some thoughts about the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of IDEA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The Commonwealth's regulations are called Chapter 766. Let's for the moment, consider the White House release:

**The White House**

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release  
November 29, 2010

**Statement by the President on the 35th Anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

In America, we believe that every child, regardless of class, color, creed, or ability, deserves access to a world-class education. But as recently as thirty-five years ago, an American child with a disability might have attended school without the interventions and accommodations necessary for their success; or been involuntarily isolated in a state-run institution; or even received no education at all. That was wrong – and America set out to right it. Today, across the United States, nearly 6.6 million students with disabilities rely on the provisions of the landmark Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to ensure that they enjoy the same educational rights as all children. And as we mark the thirty-fifth anniversary of that law, we remember what it was all about. Equal opportunity. Equal access. Not dependence, but independence. We know that our education system must hold children with disabilities to the same high standards as those without disabilities, and hold them accountable for their success and their growth. We remember that disability rights are civil rights, too – and pledge to enforce those rights in order to live up to our founding principles and ensure the promise of opportunity for all our people. And even as we celebrate children with disabilities and their parents, teachers, advocates, and all who still strive to tear down the true barriers to success – even as we celebrate how far we've come – we commit ourselves to the ever-unfinished work of forming that more perfect union.

When I read this passage, I thought about our partnership between the schools and families in Acton. We share that particular dream and reality: equal opportunity and equal access. We hold to the principle that high standards in achievement and learning are not only required by us, but also expected by you.

Over the year, you have seen the development of our policies about wellness, safety in our schools, bullying prevention guidelines, and discussions about demographic data and its impact on the schools and curriculum. Although there are policies, procedures and guidelines necessary to formulate systemic and consistent interventions, these mechanisms are only as effective as the implementation, commitment, and belief system of our school committee, administrators, faculty and staff, parents and guardians, and most of all, our students. Both school and home have spent endless time and effort on creating a culture and environment for our schools so that achievement emerges as our top priority.

Our goal has been and remains to be one of consistency. All students have the right to learn with their peers and have a “safe passage” through our schools and community. We emphasize a productive learning style, a culture conducive to learning, and an opportunity for all children to learn. We respect differences; we honor good citizenship and achievement.

In reflection, I leave 2010 with a *spirit of hope and anticipation*. This *spirit of hope* centers on our working together to ensure that all students with disabilities are respected for who they are with their individual differences and learning style. That respect is evidenced by high standards and high achievement for every child. The *spirit of anticipation* covers both the development and enhancement of programs that are supportive of our children. We establish “safe passage” with the leadership of the School Committee and Superintendent by developing and reviewing through a comprehensive process our policies (wellness, anti-bullying, civil rights, etc.) so that everyone is on the same page. We develop district goals to assist us with our yearly and multi-year plans for the district. We develop programs to meet the needs of our students, as support in helping them to achieve those high standards. We anticipate that because of the support and involvement from our families, we will continue to build strong programs so that we too may continue to celebrate what the White House addressed in the above release.

As parents and guardians, you have done a great deal in supporting our schools as evidenced by this newsletter as well as highlighted in the November 2010 OnTeam issue. That is why I am so hopeful and anticipate such a wonderful 2011- 2012 school year. Thanks for sharing that journey with me.

*(Please note – In our November 2010 OnTeam Communique, we mentioned that we would address the interplay between academic achievement and stress management. In order to reach a broader community, an article on adolescent stress was published in the December 2010 Lamplighter, the newsletter from our Superintendent of Schools.)*

Happy New Year,

Liza Huber



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