



OnTeam September 2009

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Welcome to the 2009-2010 school year. As we begin the year, we can celebrate how federal and states policies laws and their subsequent regulations have given great credibility for the education of students who have special needs. While our task is never done, this month I am dedicating this issue to review those highlights.

We celebrate schools in the United States who have moved from excluding students with special needs to an entitlement that every child have an opportunity to attend public school (Congress, 1975). You have heard at IEP Team meetings that your child is entitled to a “free and appropriate public education (FAPE)” and later, added through IDEA (Individual Disability Education Act), “in the least restrictive environment (LRE)”. Although there are many interpretations of LRE, today there are significantly more students who are integrated into regular education classes, participating with their peers and “modeling up”, supported by appropriate accommodations and modifications, if needed.

Federal special education law further requires an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and parent participation. Parents are team members and are considered integral to the thinking and development of this IEP. Inherent are civil rights protections, which guarantee reasonable accommodations, which require aids and services to make access to regular education meaningful.

Although federal and state funding has fallen short of what was anticipated by the school district, some funding has been received. We recognize that this funding is not enough.

In August, the SpEd PAC presented to the School Committee a thorough review of your input survey results from the 2008-09 school year. Although PAC’s sample from parents was less than 10%, examining general themes and reaching out to those parents/guardians are top priorities for my team. Specifically, it is important to recognize that all our families have important opinions about school-parent partnerships and communication; IEP development, its processes and goals; parents perceptions about communication with teachers and administrators; the quality and provision of services and on a more systemic level, bullying. Many themes focused on communication within these categories. The actual survey report is available on our web site and hard copies are available in Pupil Services.

Similar to the work that was done subsequently to the Special Education Fiscal Task Force, my intention is to address the PAC survey results through the development of action plans. I plan to similarly address many of these themes through OnTeam issues in which information will be shared as well as an

opportunity for parents to join a selected number of community forums during the next school year. This format is similar to the design of the demographic forums, which are currently being coordinated as well. As always, I will emphasize heavily the issues of communication and have a dialogue for parents to address their concerns. Again, the major sections from the survey are: school and parent partnership, IEP development, teachers and administration; quality and provision of services, and on a more systemic level, continuation of anti-bullying efforts.

Using the PAC survey as a guide, I have developed a “next steps” approach to address each concern that is listed in the survey report by professional development, more communication with parents through forums and OnTeam topics, and review of guidelines and policies at the levels of teachers and staff, administrators, Superintendent and School Committee. I hope you are able to join us during these sessions and give us your feedback.

Finally, no matter where your son/daughter is attending school, the OnTeam attachment provides you with a school directory which includes all specialists’ names and telephone numbers. Please be sure to print out the documents applicable to you and your family. In general, parents should call the regular education teacher; for specific IEP related matters, the special education liaison. You may also wish to refer to the 2009-2010 Parent Communication Map, which is available by accessing the link <http://ab.mec.edu/pdf/ParentCommunicationMap.pdf>

Welcome again to the 2009-2010 school year not only to our returning students and families but also to our new students and families. If you are an elementary parent, please take time to meet and say hello to our interim elementary Chairperson, Lynne Laramie, who oversees the coordination of services and faculty at the elementary schools. Lynne has been a member of our school system for 23 years and a Special Educator at the Gates school. On behalf of the Pupil Services leadership team, we look forward to a wonderful year.

Sincerely,

Liza Huber

Director of Pupil Services



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AB SpEd PAC Website <http://www.abspedpac.org>

Oktoberfest 5K Run/Walk in West Acton

Looking for something fun to do with your family or friends that will support a worthy local cause? Come join us for a family friendly 5K Run/Walk in West Acton on **Saturday, October 3rd**. After running/walking the route you can check out all the vendors and fun family activities at the West Acton Oktoberfest. If you **name the AB SpEd PAC as your Charity of Choice on the registration form**, \$5 of the \$15 registration fee will be donated to the AB SpEd PAC to help fund quality speakers and other events that support families and children in our community with special needs. To register go to the Middlesex West Chamber of Commerce’s website at www.mwccoc.com and click on the Calendar of Upcoming Events, then follow the link to this event. Feel free to share this information with family, friends or coworkers whom you think might enjoy participating. We’re all looking for creative ways to raise funds these days and this sounds like a wonderful opportunity for all!