

Parent Workshop Day Welcome Address

From the Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council (AB SpEd PAC)

By Paul Clough & Nancy Sherburne

Nancy Sherburne and I are the Co-Chairs of the Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council (AB SpEd PAC or PAC). We want to extend our welcome to all parents and guardians of special needs children in the school district as well as to any other persons interested in special education who might like to participate in our organization. We are working hard this year to increase peoples' awareness of the PAC and its role in the community. So, we'd like to take a moment to share with you who we are and what we do.

First, in terms of charter, Massachusetts state law mandates that each school district have a Parent Advisory Council that advises the school district or school committee on matters pertaining to the education and safety of students with special needs. Massachusetts General Laws also direct the PAC to meet regularly with school officials to participate in the planning, development and evaluation of the district's special education programs. This is a pretty broad mandate, so how does the PAC work here in the Acton-Boxborough school district?

Well, last year a group of special education parents together with the Pupil Services' Leadership Team worked very hard to revitalize the PAC in our school district. Together we have created a healthy, constructive working relationship between special education parents and the school district. This year we have opened a respectful dialogue with school administrators and school committee members about the role of the PAC in our school district. This is an on-going, public conversation that we hope will bring greater definition and understanding to all parties. In addition, the AB SpEd PAC Officers meet monthly with Pupil Services staff and School Committee members to discuss special education programs, district policies and practices, families' access to special education staff and programs, and special education related budget issues. These monthly PAC Board meetings take place the first Wednesday evening of every month at 7:00 PM in the High School Library and are open to the public.

While the PAC and school district do not always agree on the topics we discuss, everyone involved works hard to maintain a spirit of cooperation and respect, so that together we can improve the outcomes for children with special needs in our school district. Both parents and special education administrators are committed to this goal. So, one of the primary functions of the AB SpEd PAC is to bring special education issues related to the education and safety of our children to the district's attention. Together our combined voices help to make sure that parent's priorities stay on the school district's agenda and influence the development of district programs and policies.

Another important function of the PAC is as a resource to the parent community. Some of our services include sponsoring speakers on various educational topics; maintaining a

website with links to special needs services, providers and other resources; providing a calendar of events that are taking place in local and surrounding communities; and maintaining two email lists: 1) the AB General List – for general announcements and 2) the Parent_2_Parent email list, which is an on-line parent support group. In this latter forum parents can ask questions and advice of one another or discuss issues of importance to the community.

So, essentially the PAC's main goal is to connect and support families and together be a strong voice for children with special needs in the school district. Participating in the PAC is a great way to meet other families and learn from each other's experiences how to navigate the often confusing world of special education. We want you to know that you're not alone; there's help and support from other parents just a phone call away.

Volunteer Opportunities - The PAC is a parent volunteer organization, so we need help to accomplish all of these important tasks. There are opportunities available to volunteer at whatever level of time commitment fits your schedule. The PAC doesn't and can't work without the help of a broad base of parents in the community. On behalf of the PAC Executive Board, we urge all parents and guardians to seriously consider getting involved to help our children achieve all that they are capable of achieving.

To Join: If you are interested in more information about the PAC or would like to join one of our email lists, please contact either Nancy Sherburne at nsherburne@mindspring.com or (978) 635-0968 or Paul Clough at phclough@verizon.net or (978) 266-9322. You can also learn more about the AB SpEd PAC at our website: www.abspedpac.org.

Upcoming Events:

On Dec. 12th at 7:00 PM in the R. J. Grey JH Library – Bruce Sabian, Director of the Academy MetroWest, will give a **presentation on social skills development** for children with ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome, and Non Verbal Learning Disabilities. He will also talk about intervention strategies and provide tips on limit setting for children with these challenges.

On Jan. 16th at 7:00 PM in the R. J. Grey JH Library – A speaker from the Federation for Children with Special Needs will give a **presentation titled, "Yelling Doesn't Work."** She will discuss what you can do to help your child with special needs comply at home and in the classroom using positive behavior supports. This workshop provides insight into why a child with special needs misbehaves and how changing your behavior will in turn change theirs. Learn to recognize the function of behavior and how a front-end approach will show results. Functional Assessments, which are at the heart of a Positive Behavior Support Plan, will be discussed at length and sample plans will be provided.

Parent Workshop Day Welcome Address

**From the Acton-Boxborough Parents of Children with Challenges Support Group
(ABPCC)**

By Francesca Ricciardi

The Acton Boxborough Parents of Children with Challenges is a support group, and its primary goal is to connect parents with other parents confronting similar issues. By sharing concerns, experiences, resources and ideas with each other, we strive to form a community of parents who can provide mutual support and comfort.

We meet once a month during the day in the Acton Boxborough High School for open discussions regarding the topic of the month or for general help and exchanging of ideas and information between us. We try to bring in speakers each month in the evenings to support the issues of the parents within our group and to educate and inform ourselves. There is no stipulation or requirements to be a part of the group so if your children have any challenge or difficulty in any area of their lives that you would like more information about please feel free to come and join us.

Our next evening speaker will be Dr. LeClair who will be speaking about language based and non verbal learning disabilities on November 27 at 7:30 p.m. at the R.J Grey Library. Dr. Le Clair will present a developmental perspective of each of these disorders and discuss the challenges they pose both at school and at home from preschool through adolescence. Dr. Le Clair will make suggestions to guide parents on how to help raise children with these disabilities and will work on some practical day to day situations.

Dr LeClair is a Staff Psychologist at Children's Hospital and Director of the Pediatric Psychology Program in the Developmental Medicine Center.

If you would like to be a part of this group, or for further information, please contact either Lynn Armstrong at 978-266-0458 or lynn.armstrong2@verizon.net or Francesca Ricciardi at 978-266-9708 or FMR08@verizon.net