

OnTeam

November, 2007



Dear Parents and Guardians,

With over 140 families in attendance, we consider our second Parent Workshop a resounding success. This workshop helped facilitate face-to-face conversations, in a spirit of trust and collaboration. As reflected in our Feedback forms, I think everyone who attended enjoyed the day. We continue to be committed to child-driven, family-centered, community-focused approaches with a commitment to diversity and continuous learning. Thank you for coming!

A summary of our workshops is as follows:



Navigating the Team Meeting Process **Presented by Ms. Liza Huber, Director of Pupil Services**

In addition to providing hands on information regarding the laws and regulations pertaining to special education, this keynote address discussed the themes of collaboration between home and school. Good listening and communication skills were emphasized, including strategies for parents to get the most out of a Team meeting. Suggestions included the use of agendas, writing down concerns prior to a Team meeting, summarizing concerns into questions and more. In addition to the use of data collection for measuring student progress, sharing family stories, providing anecdotes, offering and asking for examples help Teams to better understand a student's needs and provide guidance for educational programming.



Protecting Your Children from Harassment and Bullying: Becoming a Better Advocate **Presented by Mr. Richard W. Cole, Esq.** *Nationally Known Civil Rights Attorney*

Richard Cole has been an integral part of the school district's safe school initiative and sharing a common language among parents and educators has been an important first step for reducing incidents of bullying and harassment. In addition to defining terms and understanding patterns of inappropriate behavior, parents learned how to identify the characteristic of a hostile environment and signs that their children might be experiencing harassment and bullying during their day.

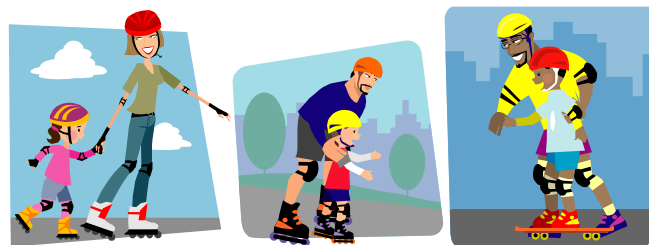
The dialogue regarding what we can do as educators and parents was extremely important as Mr. Cole shared important steps to take when an incident of bullying and harassment is observed. In this regard, participants practiced strategies - - for intervening and stopping incidents, modeling appropriate behavior, and seeking assistance. Specifically, Mr. Cole emphasized the critical importance of modeling respect and acceptance of others, teaching children about fairness and the wrongfulness of discrimination and exclusion, and ideas for building empathy and appreciating diversity. Intervening requires active involvement by explicitly speaking to children about disrespectful behavior, immediately intervening when bullying and harassment are observed, etc. Advocacy strategies to help our children included keeping logs, connecting with appropriate school officials, the use of written safety plans, and more.



Parenting Children with ADHD - A Little Humor Goes a Long Way
Mr. Walter Sherburne
Psychotherapist, Private Practice

All in attendance at the lecture on ADHD by Mr. Walter Sherburne were treated to useful, up to date information as well as a light-hearted and humorous look at an often frustrating and anxiety provoking subject. Mr. Sherburne spoke about how often ADHD is misdiagnosed and misunderstood and provided a clear definition of ADHD as a neurological syndrome, genetically influenced with three core symptoms: Inattention/Distractibility, Impulsivity, and Hyperactivity.

Mr. Sherburne's humor was well placed as well as was his sensitivity to the complexity and individuality of managing this disability. In sharing some staggering statistics from the National Institute on Mental Health, Mr. Sherburne was clear in stating that medication should never be used alone to address this disability and that understanding the secondary effects of depression and anger is critical to successful treatment. Mr. Sherburne answered the questions of some of our very well informed parents and local professionals and made himself available for more individual questions following his presentation.



Integrating Children on the Autism Spectrum-Insuring Smooth Transition
Presented by Jennifer Rutland
Director of Counseling, Realizing Children's Strengths (RCS)

Jennifer Rutland joined us to share her thoughts on important factors when transitioning children on the Autism Spectrum. Given that the leading source of anxiety in this population is an unexpected event or change in plan, Jennifer spoke to the importance of creating a transition plan. Key elements to ensuring success include parent involvement, team work, making connections with the receiving team, student centered planning, and planning ahead. Important points to include in a successful transition plan include identification of the type of placement, the needed related services, a contact person for parents and teachers, a timeline, visitation to the new setting by parents, child and teachers, observation of the child by the receiving team, and

consideration of curriculum materials. Further, the TEAM should create a comprehensive communication plan, consider necessary classroom accommodations, necessary testing accommodations, types of instruction and prompts along with effective strategies for targeting social skills.



Childhood Adolescent Depression: Symptoms, Interventions, and Suggestions for Promoting Resilience

Presented by Nadja N. Reilly, Ph.D.
Staff Psychologist, Children's Hospital, Boston

Nadja Reilly presented a research-based workshop on depression to parents and school staff. Her style was open; her information current and enlightening. Nadja began with a discussion of the symptoms of stress for both children and then adolescents, noting the differences. She went on to clarify the myths of depression, emphasizing for all of us the extent of the problem, and then explained the risk factors for mood disorders. It was striking to hear how depression looks so different in children than in adults, and how difficult it is to sort through the various symptoms to tease out an accurate diagnosis. A mood disorder can look similar to Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, a learning disability, an anxiety disorder. Furthermore, a child can have a combination of these difficulties. Nadja discussed suicide and then offered information about how to get help if you think your child may be dealing with depression and/or suicide. She helped us understand varying approaches to helping our children, both elementary and secondary.



The Comprehensive Medical Management of Special Needs

Presented by Dr. Suzanne Manea
Medical Director of the Integrated Center for Child Development

Dr. Susan Manea spoke to parents and staff about medical issues pertaining to children with special needs. Dr. Manea is a board certified physician specializing in pediatrics and genetics and has worked closely with well known Dr. Raphael Castro who recommended her to speak. As Dr. Manea's expertise includes a variety of autism spectrum disorders (ASDs), genetic disorders, and learning and developmental disabilities, she had a great deal of professional experience, research, and anecdotes to share with the group. Citing the importance of a comprehensive approach to the care of children with behavioral/medical conditions, Dr. Manea spoke about the role of a medical work-up of ASDs to better understand causes and to anticipate potential future health risks associated with some conditions, such as Down Syndrome and Fragile X. She described how much information can be gleaned from thorough questioning of parents about their child's behaviors as well as watching the child play with toys and how the child interacts with the parents. In a discussion of the use of medications, she stated the medication is still the first line of therapy for children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity

Disorder. Dr. Manea also suggested that melatonin is a safe medication to be used for managing some of the sleep issues faced by children with a variety of behavioral and medical conditions.



The Homework Challenge and Solutions: Executive Function Processes
Presented by Ms. Kalyani Krishna
Language & Learning Specialist at the Institute for Learning and Development (ILD)

This workshop provided parents with a better understanding of how children learn and offered practical guidelines and strategies on how to help children with learning difficulties achieve academic success. Using real life anecdotes and examples, Ms. Krishna emphasized the need to nurture your child's individual strengths while understanding his/her learning differences. As a complete learning picture helps to foster independence and confidence, Ms. Krishna offered home and school strategies, step-by-step homework plans, and suggestions for promoting self-advocacy. Parents participating in this workshop walked away with a new "tool kit" for helping their child manage increasing homework demands at every grade level.



Enhancing Reading Skills
Presented by Ms. Lynn Mulrooney, Coordinator for Elementary Pupil Services
Special Education Coordinator, K-6, Acton Public Schools

During this two hour workshop, the latest findings from leading researchers in the field of reading were explored. The five key elements necessary in the development of independent readers were described in depth including phonemic awareness, phonology, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. Educational terms relating to reading were defined as well. Workshop participants had an opportunity to discuss how difficulties in any of these key areas can impact reading development, with a focus on how to foster reading skill development and good reading habits at home. Parents were able to relate personal experiences, questions and concerns which the presenter addressed during the latter part of the workshop.

In summary, all of our workshops balanced practical advice and strategies readily applicable to any environment and we thank our presenters for sharing their expertise with us. We are committed to next year's planning - sharing strategies, insights, and ideas; we welcome your continued and valuable feedback. If you have time to get involved with next year's planning, we

encourage you to get in touch with us. We'd love your participation. Please be aware that all workshop handouts are available in the Pupil Services Lending Library. We encourage you to stop by at any time to look through our many resources.

Sincerely,

Liza Huber
Director of Pupil Services
Acton Public and Acton-Boxborough Regional School District



Join the Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council by visiting
www.abspedpac.org
Co-Chair Paul Clough, phclough@verizon.net
Co-Chair Nancy Sherburne, nsherburne@mindspring.com

