



# The BSE Communicator

A Quarterly Update from the PA Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education

Fall 2007

Volume 2, Number 2



## Grants and Awards Highlight the Beginning of School Year

**John J. Tommasini, Director**

The 2006-07 school year started with news that Pennsylvania has been named the recipient of several grants and awards that will benefit the BSE's support of professional development for educators and services for children with disabilities. This edition highlights achievements as well as collaborative efforts of the BSE with others.

### BSE Staff Update

Richard Moss has been named Division Chief, Division of Compliance Monitoring and Planning, West. He has been serving as an adviser in BSE, handling contingency funds, the IDEA- B grant application process, Accountability Block Grants and numerous other duties. Masako Farrell is Division Chief, Division of Compliance Monitoring and Planning, East, and Tom Seben is Division Chief, Division of Compliance Monitoring and Planning, Central.

### Pennsylvania Receives \$1 Million Grant

The BSE and the Bureau of Assessment and Accountability, under the leadership of John Tommasini and Dr. Shula Nedley, received a three-year, \$1 million Individuals with Disabilities Education Act General Supervision Enhancement Grant. The goal of the grant is to develop Pennsylvania Modified Academic Achievement Standards based on the state's academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled. More than 18,000 students with IEPs from a wide range of disability categories in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 could potentially achieve proficient status on an assessment based on the eventual outcome of this project. The grant includes the development of clear and appropriate guidelines for Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams to use in determining which students should be assessed on modified academic achievement standards and statewide training on those guidelines for IEP teams. It will also provide statewide integrated and coordinated professional development for implementation of standards-based IEPs by all local educational agencies (LEAs). All activities will be coordinated with existing professional development activities and appropriate state and federal resources. A partnership with the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) will provide the additional expertise in implementation.



### President's Award from PA Society for the Advancement of the Deaf

John J. Tommasini (left), director of the BSE, received the President's Award from the Pennsylvania Society for the Advancement of the Deaf (PSAD). Presented by Larry Brick, the award was for his "quiet support in respecting ERCHL (Educational Resources for Children with Hearing Loss) and PSAD's recommendations," and, "contributing greatly to the quality of education for deaf children which included respect for the deaf child's preferred/primary communication style." PSAD appreciates his willingness to listen and learn, and his support of a continuum of choices for education of children who are deaf and hard of hearing with all options considered.



### Bloomsburg University Provides Online Courses for the Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Bloomsburg University is using Wimba's Live Classroom, a Web-based learning tool, to offer deaf and hard of hearing students an online course that includes a sign language interpreter and closed-captioning to accompany the slide presentation and instructor's voice. The Wimba project began two years ago with a \$53,000 Pennsylvania State Improvement grant, secured by the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN), to explore online classes for special needs populations across Pennsylvania and to develop highly qualified personnel.

Taught by Dr. Sam Slike, the introductory course focuses on the history, education and guidance of the deaf and hard of hearing and is a prerequisite to a master of science program for teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing. During the weekly two-hour class, students can remotely view the slide presentation; hearing students can listen to the lecture; deaf or hard of hearing students can either watch the sign language interpreter on the video screen, who works in front of a Web camera, or they can read the closed-caption text that scrolls across the screen at the same time. The captions are also useful as a backup for students who are hard of hearing or are just learning to use sign language, Dr. Slike said. "There's a lot of rich information happening at once," Dr. Slike said, "whether you're a deaf or hearing student." He said he's scoured the country and hasn't found another instance of a higher education use of real-time interpreted video and real-time close captioning simultaneously with a



You're the only one  
who can make a  
difference. Whatever  
your dream,  
go for it!

Ervin "Magic" Johnson

#### Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Edward G. Rendell,  
Governor

#### Department of Education

Gerald L. Zahorchak,  
D.Ed., Secretary

#### Office of Elementary and Secondary Education

Diane Castelbuono,  
Deputy Secretary

#### Bureau of Special Education

John J. Tommasini,  
Director

#### Contact Us:

Pennsylvania  
Department of  
Education

Bureau of Special  
Education  
333 Market Street  
Harrisburg PA  
17126-0333

717-783-6913

pde.state.pa.us

#### Editor:

Marci S. Davis  
717-541-4960, x3922  
mdavis@pattan.net

spoken lecture. More information available at: [www.campustechnology.com/article.aspx?aid=56259](http://www.campustechnology.com/article.aspx?aid=56259)

#### Educators Honored as Recipients of Inclusive Education Awards



TASH, an international membership association leading the way to inclusive communities through research, education and advocacy, selected Dr. Kimberly Donahue (left) and Dr. Cathy Taschner as recipients of the Administrator award of the inaugural *Breakthroughs in Inclusive Education Awards!* Co-principals of Twin Valley Middle School in Berks County, they were honored at the TASH annual conference in Seattle this month. Their self-written biographical information speaks volumes about why they were selected to receive this prestigious award: "Schools belong to children...ALL children. As educators, once we determine that schools belong to all students, and once we commit to valuing the

students that come to us, we can move ahead with the job that we were called to do...teach! Our focus has been centered on building classrooms that will dynamically respond to the unique learning needs that all students possess. Schools must continue to change classrooms to meet the needs of students, rather than trying to change students to meet the needs of classrooms!" Both are members of the Advisory Committee on Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

#### LRE Training and Support for 19 School Districts

Nineteen teams of stakeholders (parents, educators and administrators) from school districts that had received LRE monitoring and were in the process of doing their Improvement Plans participated in training in October. The purpose of the training was to provide an overview of LRE and inclusive practices. Dr. Richard Villa, from the Bayridge Consortium, presented on the "what," "why" and "how" of inclusive practices. The BSE is collaborating with Dr. Villa as he conducts onsite visits to each of the 19 school districts to support their LRE activities.

#### SAVE THESE DATES!: February 24-27, 2008 – Annual PDE Conference

"Indicators for Success: Improvement, Performance and Results" is the title of the Pennsylvania Department of Education's 2008 Annual Conference to be held in Hershey.

#### Bureaus of Special Education and Teaching and Learning Collaborate

The BSE and the Bureau of Teaching and Learning (Ed Vollbrecht, director, and Angela Kirby-Wehr, special assistant to the secretary) have been meeting to develop new ideas. The goal is to find ways that general education curriculum and instruction staff can take a more active role in planning with special education staff on accommodating more children through evidence-based inclusive practices. The bureaus met recently with intermediate unit (IU) special education and curriculum coordinators to begin a formal dialogue that helps move both bureaus in the direction of creating a single educational system that supports all learners.

#### "Welcome All" Packet Orders

The Pennsylvania Department of Education mailed elementary and secondary posters and resource booklets, titled "Welcoming All Students: Resources for Pennsylvania Schools," to each school district, IU and charter school's administrator for each school building. For additional copies, use the link below to place an order for English or Spanish posters (the 8th item down on the page) and/or booklets (on Page 2). After clicking on "Request Hard Copy" for items requested, scroll to the top of the page and click on "Proceed to Request Form" (shown below the "Search" button) – the quantity requested and address/mailling information may then be entered.

<http://www.pattan.net/resources/request.aspx?pageNumber=0&InterestArea=51&MaterialType=Publications>

## Questions & Answers

### 1 What is the status of the proposed Chapter 14 amendments for special education?

The proposed amendments are entering the second and final stage of the regulatory review process. Chapter 14 is aligned with the IDEA. The proposed amendments were approved by the State Board of Education on November 15 and will now be sent through the regulatory process for review and approval by the House and Senate Education committees and IRRC before being published in the PA Bulletin by June 30, 2008. The Chapter 14 revisions need to be finalized by June 30, 2008, to enable the state to be eligible to receive federal funds. The new regulations will be effective for the 2008-09 school year.

### 2 Why is it important to include families in Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) activities?

Families are critical partners in educating their children. Families are critical team members who bring a unique perspective to planning at the student, school and district level.

### What are effective strategies to engage families?

- Involve them "from the ground up" so that they feel like they are equal team members and that their voices are valued

(continued on page 3)

- Offer different kinds of opportunities for involvement: support groups, informal discussion groups on topics of interest, presenters at PTA and staff meetings, members of planning teams
- Go out into the community to share information
- Build relationships with families

*If we ask ourselves if there is any place within our society in which people with disabilities are fully integrated the answer is yes. If we look at families that include a child with a disability we can see total acceptance and full participation. In families we can see a vision of what we must achieve in schools, workplaces, and recreation and leisure – in all of community life.*

*Doug Biklen*