



The BSE Communicator

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Parent Collaborations Set the Stage for Success

John J. Tommasini, Director

Student success is achieved through a group effort and the collaborations between educators and parents certainly play a major role in building the foundation for student success. This issue of the BSE Communicator highlights just a few of the parent collaborations we have in place that provide a strong network of support for all students.

BSE partners with four Parent Resource Centers that receive federal funding for training, including: Hispanics United for Exceptional Children (HUNE), The Mentor Parent Program, the Parent Education & Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center, and the Parent Education Network (PEN). We collaborate with these organizations, and many others to increase training opportunities for families with special needs. We recently received a federal school improvement grant, "Improving Student Results: A Focus on Highly Qualified School Personnel," to support developing the professional development curricula. Funding from this grant also provides an opportunity for us to work in collaboration with both PEN and the PEAL Center.

Collaboration occurs throughout the year in many different ways. In February, I had the opportunity to make a presentation on BSE initiatives to the ARC Parent Association's executive directors' meeting in Gettysburg. Some of the BSE's other collaborations, and additional parent resources and information, are highlighted on the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) website, including a Parent Page, at: <http://parent.pattan.net/>

Student Successes

There are two student success stories that I would like to share. The first is about Becca, who recently was awarded an orange belt in Karate (shown in photo). She is a student at



Nitschmann Middle School in Bethlehem and was mainstreamed since she began elementary school. She started middle school with a part-time Therapeutic Support Staff (TSS) member and, for the first time in her life, she is TSS free at school! She has 10 minutes of aide support per day, for transition time, and is in the most difficult academic track. An all A's honor roll student last semester, she no longer has a behavior plan and has participated in the school musical, the band front, Girl Scouts, the holiday concert, and she was named one of 10 finalists out of 1,000 students in the school Geography Bee. She also attended her first school dance.

There were no Verbal Behavior (VB) Project classrooms when Becca started school, so she was in kindergarten with full TSS coverage. Mom Julie credits the VB Project with "dogged insistence on data and reading the literature" and the support received through PaTTAN for Becca's great successes. She said, "Becca was always verbal, but started with discrete trial at age 4 with almost no imitation, mostly defective mands, and we pretty much had to teach everything from the ground up." And she says, "Becca is definitely not "cured" or "recovered" – her peers know that she is different and her social skills still need some work...but she has made huge, huge leaps of progress, built on teeny tiny little steps." Her family credits her teachers, the VB Project and PaTTAN staff for Becca's successes.

The other success story was relayed through a "thank you" note. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team for a student suggested that the family use Short Term Loan, based at PaTTAN, for a Tech/Speak communication device last summer. As a result of using the assistive device his speech progressed so much that his IEP team recommended that he no longer needed assistive technology. His family was thrilled and made a donation to Autism Speaks in the name of Mike Onofrey, Short Term Loan Technical Support Specialist, at PaTTAN Harrisburg.

Parent Consultants

In an effort to ensure that parent collaborations are supported and grow, I established Parent Consultant positions at each of the three PaTTAN offices: Pittsburgh, King of Prussia, and Harrisburg. The charge of the Parent Consultants is to provide a parent perspective of our work

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

Ervin "Magic" Johnson

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so that they can help their children through the educational system. All four have hit the ground running. I would like to take this opportunity to introduce the new Parent Consultants.

Judy Baker (Pittsburgh) has been involved in her community and at the state level for the past 10 years with education and mental health systems, serving on task forces, advisory boards, and committees. Judy currently serves on the Pennsylvania Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP). She resides in Warren County with her husband Mike, son Collan, a senior, and two grandchildren Jordan, 8th grade, and Tyler, 2nd grade.

Linda Cartwright (King of Prussia) shares the Parent Consultant title with Jacqui Didomenico. Married to an electrician-turned-paraeducator, they have two boys, ages 7 and 9. Steven, the eldest, has Trisomy 21 – the impetus for her getting involved in advocacy, special education, and fundraising. She is a member of her county's Local Task Force for Right to Education, a board member of MARC Advocacy, and co-chair of The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia Buddy Walk for Down Syndrome (held at Villanova University each Fall), and is currently working on starting a parent group in her school district.

Jacqui Didomenico (King of Prussia) taught in Montessori preschools for 16 years. In her experience of parenting three children, including a son with Down Syndrome, she began to advocate for inclusion. She is the past president of the Montgomery County Down Syndrome Interest Group, a member of MARC's advocacy board, and a member of the Local Educational Task Force.

Amiris Dipuglia (Harrisburg) brings to PaTTAN her expertise as a board certified behavior analyst and also her experience as a mother of an autistic son. She has been providing services to children with autism, their families, and educational teams for the past seven years. Amiris is also currently working for our Verbal Behavior Project.

PA Council for Exceptional Children Resolution – Collaboration with BSE

In a recent issue of the Pennsylvania Council for Exceptional Children (PA-CEC) newsletter, a resolution was printed recognizing the Partnership Between the Pennsylvania Association Council for Exceptional Children (PA-CEC) and the Pennsylvania Department of Education, BSE. It reads:

Whereas, the PA-CEC is the largest special education professional organization in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and is uniquely positioned to disseminate information and to influence public policy regarding special education;

Whereas, the PDE is responsible for providing leadership in Pennsylvania BSE through legislative recommendations, regulation development and enforcement and provision of professional development;

Be it resolved that the PA-CEC acknowledges the importance of the partnership between the PA-CEC and the BSE within PDE and offers its thanks for their joint participation in the *Leadership Initiative*.

Be it further resolved that PA-CEC looks forward to strengthening its relationship with the BSE in delivering resources and services on issues affecting children and youth with disabilities, their families, and professionals working with exceptional learners.

2008 Annual PDE Conference

The 2008 PDE Annual Conference was an overwhelming success with almost 1600 participants and 60 special education topic sessions. The conference offered opportunities for learning, networking, and most importantly, solid examples of how we can all support student success. Thanks to PaTTAN King of Prussia for the months of planning and organizing. The 2009 PDE Annual Conference will be held April 14-17, in Hershey, with the keynote "Educational Reform" by Dr. Michael Fullan, Dean, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto.

BSE Staff Update – New Special Education Adviser for Policy

Patty Todd is returning to BSE from Pottsville SD where she was the special education director. She will serve as the Special Education Adviser for Policy.

Question & Answer

Where can I find information concerning Parental Consent issues as well as Understanding Parental Consent and the School-Based ACCESS Program (SBAP)?

Leader Services has a thorough and reader-friendly Frequently Asked Questions sheet as well as the Understanding Parental Consent and the SBAP as part of their SBAP Manual, as well as other valuable information, on their site at www.leaderservices.com/. The two question & answer sheets on SBAP are located at:

http://www.leaderservices.com/pa/forms/forms/SBAP_parental_consent_information.pdf
http://www.leaderservices.com/pa/forms/2007/Parental_Consent_FAQ.pdf