



The BSE Communicator

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

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Summer Brings Many Opportunities for Learning

John J. Tommasini, Director

As the school year winds down for students in Pennsylvania, planning and training activities gear up in preparation for the 2008-09 school year. One end-of-year project the BSE has been working on is a DVD to be distributed in June to each school district via their intermediate unit that highlights the importance of implementing effective inclusive practices in every classroom. Titled "Inclusive Schools: Learning, Working, Achieving Together," the DVD is accompanied by resource materials regarding Least Restrictive Environment and highlights students, parents and administrators sharing their successes.

There are numerous training opportunities for parents and educators available throughout the summer months featuring nationally-recognized presenters. In addition to the listing below, all PaTTAN & PDE professional development opportunities are shown at: www.pattan.net. I hope you and your family have a safe, fun-filled summer. I look forward to continuing to think together, plan together and work together during the 2008-09 school year!



June 30-July 3	Special Education Leadership Academy	Bedford Springs Conference Center Bedford
July 13-18	Governor's Institute for Data Driven Instructional Practices in Reading and Mathematics for School Improvement	Hershey Lodge & Convention Center & Milton Hershey School
July 22-25	PA Community on Transition Conference	Penn Stater Conference Center State College
August 4-8	National Autism Conference	Penn Stater, State College
August 4-8	Low Incidence Institute	Nittany Lion Inn, State College



BSE Staff Updates

BSE welcomes Leah Kissick, who will work with School Based ACCESS, and Behavioral Health and Interagency Initiatives, and Marie Held, the Single Point of Contact for the northern tier school districts in Allegheny Intermediate Unit 3. Ron Wells is a new special education advisor responsible for contingency funds and approval of intermediate unit special education plans.



New Assistive Device Helps Communication

Gretchen, a student in Council Rock School District, recently began using an augmentative communication device nicknamed "Big Pink" due to its bright color. She and her family are so excited that she now has a "voice" to use in communicating with them, her friends and classmates. She can even "ask" her sister to play games now.



Students with Autism are Pages for a Day in the Pennsylvania House

Several students with autism acted as "Pages for a Day" in the PA House of Representatives during April's Autism Month. As part of the Speaker of the House of Representative's "Bang the Drum for Autism Awareness" event the students carried out several page duties and experienced a day in the House. Shown with just a few of the students is Speaker O'Brien and (left to right) Riley and Tyler Zimmerman; Kyle Jewett; Zachary Pauley; and Mickey Woodings.



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

Ervin "Magic" Johnson

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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Governor

Department of Education

Gerald L. Zahorchak,
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An Autograph from Big Ben

Kristen, a student in the McGuffey School District, recently met and received an autograph from Steelers Quarterback Ben Roethlisberger.

They both have contagious smiles!

PA Association of Vocational Education Special Needs Personnel (PAVESNP) Award

The annual PAVESNP Life/Work Challenge Award recognizes a student who has overcome barriers in realizing life/work potential. The 2008 recipient is Matthew Ulrich, son of Martha & Rickie Ulrich, a student at SUN Area Career & Technology Center (ACTC) and Selinsgrove Area High School. (In the photo Matthew is shown with Jim Romig, Advance Wood Products instructor.)



The summer before his senior year, he was involved in a very bad accident that left him in a coma for two weeks, hospitalized for over a month, and recuperating for a year. In addition to a traumatic brain injury (TBI), he sustained several other internal and external injuries and he was unable to fulfill his dream to attend SUN ACTC for Masonry in the fall of his senior year.

When he was in 1st grade he was diagnosed with a learning disability and it was apparent as he got older that he had dyslexia. Prior to his accident he was a varsity football player. After his car accident, his TBI affected his thought process, his level of energy and physical ability. He chose to waive his diploma in order to attend SUN ACTC but this time in Wood Products, as his injuries made it too difficult for Masonry. He earned his Eagle Scout and maintains at least one, sometimes two, jobs outside of school. He was nominated by Wendy Chalmers, SUN ACTC resource specialist, with recommendation letters from Dave Hess, Selinsgrove teacher and football coach; John Bohn, director, SUN ACTC; and Jim Romig, instructor.

First Responders Trained

Over 200 firefighters, police and emergency personnel participated in training for interacting with persons with autism during criminal justice situations. Dennis Debbaudt, author, and father of a son with autism, presented and the event was organized by PaTTAN and Karen Woodings, a board member of the Harrisburg Chapter of the Autism Society of America. The training was covered on Harrisburg television WHP 21. ***There is now a program for families of persons with special needs to alert first responders, PA Premise Alert, at: papremisealert.com.***

Delaware Visitors Impressed with Verbal Behavior (VB) Project

The Lincoln Intermediate Unit (LIU) had visitors from the Delaware State Autism Program visit several classrooms in the Spring Grove School District. Delaware pioneered developing good services for kids with autism and they were very impressed with the PA Verbal Behavior (VB) Project. The LIU started with two classrooms in the VB Project and they now have seven in three counties.

Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR) Staff to Participate in National Summit

The Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR) will be representing Pennsylvania at a national train the trainer *Creating Agreement* program on May 30 in New Jersey. The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) has invited a few state directors or their designees to represent the state educational agency view on a new and very promising project to assist parents and educators to "create agreement" and avoid, minimize, or appropriately address, conflict during the individualized family service plan (IFSP) process. Kerry Smith, director of the ODR, and Gloria Satriale, consultant to ODR, have been designated to represent Pennsylvania at this summit. We join New Hampshire and Wisconsin in this important endeavor.

The program is sponsored by SPAN (the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network), the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) Partnership at NASDSE, and CADRE (Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education), an Office of Special Education Programs funded project. Presenters include representatives from several parent and educational agencies and associations who will show how to facilitate *Creating Agreement* modules in Pennsylvania developed by a team of parent centers, general and special educators and administrators.