



The BSE Communicator

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

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Highlighting Our Successes

John J. Tommasini, Director

Communication with parents, advocacy organizations and educators about the many opportunities for progress available to each student with disabilities in Pennsylvania, with emphasis on research-based practices of Pennsylvania's Standards Aligned System (www.pde.state.pa.us/sas) is key to the success of the programs we offer. In this issue of *The BSE Communicator* we're sharing updates about our programs and highlighting the many successes of students with disabilities and educators.



New Q & A Publication Posted for Chapter 14 Regulations

The final Chapter 14 regulations were published in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin* on June 28, 2008, and became effective on July 1, 2008. A Question and Answer sheet as well as a side-by-side Chapter 14/IDEA 2004 publication, along with several additional resources, is now available at: [www.pattan.net/regsforms/chapter14\(schooldistricts\).aspx](http://www.pattan.net/regsforms/chapter14(schooldistricts).aspx)

Special Education Teacher a Nominee for PA Teacher of the Year

We congratulate Stephanie Ruby, an Autistic Support teacher from Ramsey Elementary School, Gateway School District in Allegheny County, who was one of only 12 teachers nominated for the 2009 Pennsylvania State Teacher of the Year award.

Barb Wallace and her son Matt (*I to r in the photo with Stephanie and Gerald L. Zahorchak, Secretary of Education*) introduced Ruby at the ceremony. Her biography noted that she "views education as the vital path to independence for students with disabilities, and she devotes herself to finding every possible method to smooth that journey for her charges."



She was one of the first teachers in Pennsylvania to become a board certified behavior analyst in applied behavior analysis and her classroom is a model for the PA Verbal Behavior Project. Rebecca Snyder, a language arts teacher at Greater Latrobe Senior High School, was named Pennsylvania's 2009 Teacher of the Year, representing Pennsylvania for the National State Teacher Award.



PaTTAN and Bureau Staff Updates

- Angela Kirby-Wehr has been named Managing Director of the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) in Harrisburg. Most recently, Angela served as the Special Assistant to the Secretary of Education at the Department of Education. She has served as both a general and special education teacher, and has supervised special education teachers and consultants in urban and suburban school districts. In addition, she has served as a consultant at PaTTAN in the areas of school improvement, reading, progress monitoring, autism and Response to Intervention.

- Keith Miller is an intern with the BSE and will be working with Dr. Shirley Curl in the area of Gifted Education.



Pilot for Students with Significant Disabilities in General Education Classes

The BSE, PaTTAN and IU personnel have been working on a collaborative partnership to support several school districts in the development of systematic and successful inclusive educational practices for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Districts, although welcoming these students, require extensive training and ongoing guided support to meet the needs of students with significant disabilities in a general education classroom. The three-year plan is designed to provide district administrators, teachers and families with the training and support necessary to educate these students in general education settings to the maximum extent appropriate. In order to reach this goal, training and technical assistance are provided to the five participating school districts, including: Berwick Area, Mt. Carmel (IU-operated classes), Mount Union Area, Southern Columbia Area and Williamsport Area.



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

Earvin "Magic" Johnson

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ODR Holds Inaugural Summit

ODR held their first Summit on *Creating Agreement in Special Education* featuring presenters Marshall Peter, director of The National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education (formerly known as CADRE), and Joanne Cashman, IDEA Partnership at NASDSE (National Association of State Directors of Special Education) in Malvern. The Summit introduced 100 participants, made up of parents and schools, to the training model designed to teach how to resolve special education conflicts at the local level and foster improved relationships, reducing the number of due process hearings each year. *In the photo, front (l-r), Marshall Peter, Kerry Smith, ODR Director, Joanne Cashman, back, (l-r): Gloria Satriale, ODR trainer, Suzanne McDougall, ConsultLine Supervisor, Dixie Rider, Dispute Resolution Coordinator*



The Pennsylvania Verbal Behavior (VB) Project Holds Open Houses

The VB Project classrooms focus interventions from the field of Applied Behavior Analysis in helping students learn critical skills in communication, academic and social domains. Classroom staff, with the support of project consultants and local internal coaches, applies the theoretical constructs of B.F. Skinner's model of verbal behavior in designing language interventions for their students. A total of approximately 550 students, as of 2008, were enrolled in the 95 classrooms. The VB Project was recently recognized in the foreword of *VB Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program* by Mark L. Sunberg, Ph.D.

The VB Project showcased classrooms that have achieved "model site status" with fall open houses, 18 of which have achieved model status. Classrooms achieve model status by virtue of their implementation score on their site review in addition to fulfilling other



outcome responsibilities of the VB Project application. The primary goals of the VB Project are to enhance learning and language skills to improve the lives of children with autism and their families. In the photo, shown at their Open House held October 13 at Robert D. Wilson Elementary School in Waymart, Western Wayne School District are, back row (l-r): William Galbraith, educational consultant, PaTTAN; Kristin Johnson, school psychologist; Michelle Mistishin, early

intervention teacher. Front row (l-r): Danielle Vokes, speech therapist; Julie Cordier, parent. (Photo courtesy of the Wayne Independent newspaper.)

Office for Dispute Resolution (ODR) Director Named to National Advisory Board

Kerry V. Smith, Esquire, the Director of ODR, which provides resources for parents and educators to resolve special education disputes, was named to the advisory board of The National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education (formerly known as CADRE), which encourages the use of mediation and other collaborative strategies to resolve disagreements about special education and early intervention programs. Services provided by ODR include: IEP Facilitation; Resolution Meeting Facilitation (pilot project); ConsultLine (a parent helpline); mediation; due process and communication and conflict resolution skills training.

Visitors to Autism Classrooms

Vicci Tucci, developer of the Competent Learner Model (CLM), accompanied by Mowfaz Mustafa, Director, and Nipa Bhuptani, Head of Autism Department, Future Centre for Special Needs, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, visited the Bloomsburg Middle School autistic support class. The Centre is implementing CLM in two autistic support classrooms and staff wanted to visit classrooms implementing CLM. Pennsylvania is the only state implementing CLM statewide within a variety of special needs classrooms. Janet S. Twyman, VP of Instructional Development, Headsprout, Inc. and past president of the Association for Behavior Analysis also visited. PaTTAN is collaborating with Headsprout in a research project identifying the effectiveness of the Headsprout Early Reading Program for children with autism. The group was also escorted to CLM classrooms in Shamokin Elementary and Oaklyn Elementary schools by Anne Katona-Linn, Educational Consultant for PaTTAN, and Cathy Scutta, PA Lead on Autism at PaTTAN.