



DEDICATED TO PROVIDING AN EXCELLENT EDUCATION TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Special Education Newsletter

MAY 2018

From the Director of the Special Education Department

Dear Parents and Guardians,

It is hard to believe that we are approaching the end of the school year so quickly! I know that many of you are participating in transition IEP meetings. We hope these meetings are helpful to you. If you have any questions, there is a document on the Special Education web page called, "Who You Gonna Call?" with a list of e-mail and phone contacts:

http://www.smmusd.org/special_education/index.html

It has been an amazing school year thus far. Although we have much more work to do, we have accomplished a great deal.

My appreciation goes out to our parents who are members of SEDAC and the PRN. The SEDAC group is progressing on important charges related to social/emotional student needs, transition, parent networking and parent communication. Parent education sessions have been held in the evenings this year. We hope to hold more sessions in the mornings next year. The District has also worked with JOY (Jewels of Youth) Foundation. This group is appreciated for the phenomenal supports provided to our parents. See the special education web page for information regarding JOY. Our gratitude extends to the Santa Monica Library. Over 100 books and resources have been purchased for families of children with disabilities. We must also recognize

the Malibu Special Education Foundation for the strong support that they have also extended to families.

The District Special Education Management Team has been working diligently to provide a menu of services and professional development for our school staff next year. For this year, professional development has been provided in the areas of collaborative teaching and positive behavioral supports. Consultants from Autism Partnership have provided guidance and coaching to our staff.

The special education team is also gearing up for Extended School Year. ESY is provided to students who may regress in the summer months. Qualification for ESY is determined in the IEP meeting. Details are forthcoming to parents of students who qualify.

As for compliance, we must hold IEP meetings on or before due dates in order to avoid economic sanctions from the state. Reports are submitted monthly. We do ask that you work with our staff to hold meetings on time.

For parental concerns, we continue to offer the service of a neutral state mediator without cost to the parent or District. Do contact our department if interested in Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) processes. The Westside Regional Center (WRC) also offers advocacy support, assessment and other supports for families.

On behalf of our District leadership, we wish you a wonderful month!

Sincerely,
Pam Kazee
SMMUSD Special Education Director

From the Chair of SEDAC

Cheers to a good SCHOOL YEAR!

SEDAC started the school year with nine new SEDAC members so this year has been about bringing new perspectives and passion to support our special needs students and also getting to know our Special Education Offering/Initiatives at the district.

We prioritized key areas of focus for the year and developed four charges supporting better communication, a stronger community, updating transition resources and also a better understanding of our current social-emotional learning programs.

While we are making steady progress, there is still work to be done! We will continue with our charges in the new school year and also review our focus areas for the coming school year. I invite you to attend the school year's last SEDAC meeting on Tuesday, June 12th. Come and share your views! Meetings are open to all and are held on the second Tuesday of each school month, at 7:00 pm, in the District Board Room.

Transition to the Next School Year

Many students face anxiety around transitioning into a new school year, especially for our students who have IEPs. You are not alone.

Last week, we heard from one of our school psychologists about *Successful School Transitions*.

Here are just a few transition tips we heard:

(1) Consider creating a flow map of where your child is now and where you'd like him/her to be next year to help guide what you might work on this summer.

(2) Prepare well for your transition meeting. Raise all pertinent points you want the (new) staff/teachers to know and be ready to ask your questions.

(3) Reinforce your child's ability to cope. Validate feelings of anxiety and fears, but set-discuss a plan during low-stress times to address and discuss with your child.

(4) For middle school, get to know your case carrier who is your primary point of contact at the middle school.

(5) Be sure and attend Back to School Day in August with your 6th grader.

We will be posting some helpful transition resources from the special ad hoc committees.

Help us build a stronger Special Ed Community. Get involved at your school.

As a parent with a student in special education, I love to meet new families in special education.

The more families I meet the more I learn about the common challenges we face and also possible solutions.

Here are three ways you can get more information on the latest in special education:

1) Attend a community social event. We include upcoming community events in our monthly Newsletter. http://www.smmusd.org/special_education/index.html

2) Confirm you are receiving District communications. If not, check with your school office.

3) Find out if a special education community exists at your school. Is there a special education PTA committee or a Parent Resource Network representative at your school?

http://www.smmusd.org/special_education/pdf/PRN.LetterApp.pdf

Have a fabulous summer and see you in the new school year!

Payal S. Maniar
SEDAC Co-Chair

April Training: Behavioral Intervention

On April 19th in Santa Monica and April 25th in Malibu, SMMUSD School Psychologist Interns, Alexandra Calabria and Hanna Haghayeghi, organized parent trainings on the topic Behavioral Intervention. This was provided in response to an area of interest expressed by parents earlier in the school year.

The training was intended to raise the awareness of behavioral interventions and strategies available in promoting academic success for students with behaviors that impact their educational performance.

During the presentation by the interns, Special Education Director, Pam Kazez, shared her ideas, experience and strategies for student success.

The size of the parent groups allowed for their active participation and interaction with the presenters and each other. Parents asked questions and shared their experiences and thoughtful comments. This facilitated a more meaningful and personalized approach to the discussion. The suggestions and ideas encouraged home-school communication and collaboration. It also validated many of the strategies in place at home and school that best support the individual learning style and needs of each child.



Behavioral Intervention Training, Santa Monica
(Photo courtesy of Barry Yates)



Behavioral Intervention Training, Malibu
(Photo courtesy of Barry Yates)

Summer Reading Program at the Santa Monica Public Library

The Santa Monica Public Library's free Summer Reading Program provides activities and incentives to keep babies through teens having fun, learning and reading while on their summer break from school. With this year's theme of "Reading Takes You Everywhere," the program runs from Saturday, June 9 through Saturday, August 18 at the Main Library and all four branch libraries.

Children will receive prizes after reading (or being read to) for 5, 10 and 15 hours. Teens receive prizes for 10, 20 and 30 hours of reading. The final prize is a brand new book to keep! The Baby & Me Club will engage parents and their babies by providing them with a free board book to add to their baby's library and get a head start on literacy.

According to the American Library Association, numerous studies show that summer reading programs help ensure that children retain reading and learning skills over the summer.

In addition to the regular story times presented each week, free programs for children ages 4 and up are offered throughout the summer at the Main Library and all branch locations, including family-friendly and educational performances of magic, music, and animal shows, puppets and more. The library's Summer Reading Program is sponsored by the Friends of the Santa Monica Public Library.

For more information, call Youth Services at 310-458-8621, or go to the

Library’s website at simpl.org, or visit us in person at the Main Library, 601 Santa Monica Blvd., or any of the four branch libraries.

Ann Wagner
Children’s Services Supervisor



Santa Monica Public Library, Main Branch
(Photo courtesy of Barry Yates)

Parenting a Child with Autism

Lauren Nolan Sills, SMMUSD parent, co-founding mother of the Malibu Special Education Foundation and former Governor Appointee to the California Advisory Commission on Special Education, authored an article about parenting a child with autism from the family’s perspective. Read her story in *The EDge* on pages 4 and 5 of this newsletter.

<p>May 15, 2018 11:30 am – 1:00 pm Parent Resource Network (PRN) Meeting Board of Education (2nd floor)</p> <p>June 8, 2018 Last day of 2017-2018 school year</p> <p>June 12, 2018 7:00 pm – 9:00 pm SEDAC Meeting (public invited) Board of Education (2nd floor)</p>	<p>Community Events (not SMMUSD sponsored)</p>
	<p>May 19, 2018 1st Annual Special Education Spring Dance Church in Ocean Park 5:00 pm – 8:00 pm Please RSVP to this free event. (see flyer on page 6)</p> <p>JOY Foundation MY KID TOO 1st Tuesday of every month 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm St. Monica Church Caruso Community Center 725 California Avenue Santa Monica, CA 90403 (310) 566-1500</p> <p>JOY Foundation Mi niño también 3rd Thursday of every month 9:00 am – 10:30 am Professional Development Learning Center (PDLC) 2802 4th Street Santa Monica, CA 90405</p>



THE EDGE

Intentional teaching and planning for California's diverse learners to allow each child an opportunity to achieve

EDGE

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From the Family's Perspective: Parenting a Child with Autism

By Lauren Nolan Sills, Co-founding Mother of the Malibu Special Education Foundation and former Governor Appointee to the California Advisory Commission on Special Education

My name is Lauren Nolan Sills. I am a recovering helicopter parent and an over-achieving mother of three: one with autism and all three with ADHD. Shockingly, all have made it into their early 20s. Phew!

I equate my parenting experience with holding on to a tiger's tail while trying to create a normal family—at least the one I dreamed in my head. And then I figured out how to love and nurture what was actually in front of me. Navigating reality is all about keeping a healthy perspective and occasionally putting on a pair of rose-colored glasses.

My older son graduated from an excellent Jesuit university in San Francisco and is now a performing artist in electronic dance music. My middle child is one of those free spirits about whom we take great comfort in saying, "she's finding herself"—as a perpetual student at a college in Washington State.

My younger son, who lives with autism, is currently enrolled at Cal State Northridge as a junior, majoring in television production. He has a 3.4 grade-point average, lives in a house with other students, and is a member of a fraternity. Pledges, girls, and toga parties . . . I can only

pray he has these typical experiences!

He is supported by The Gap Program-FACT,¹ which enables students with disabilities to attend college with something similar to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) support they received in high school. Living the dream.

This son with autism was diagnosed several weeks after 9/11. Like the rest of the nation, I was already heart-broken, and adding the words "my son has autism" to my world threw me into paralyzing fear. Back in 2001, there wasn't the awareness there is today about autism. I felt hopeless and lost.

When I finally got my sea legs back, I looked around my town and reached out to the families I knew who had a child with a disability. I decided that "I" needed to hear "their" words of wisdom. I also wondered if perhaps other people in the community would benefit from camaraderie on our common journey.

So I co-founded The Malibu Special Education Foundation, which serves the individuals with disabilities and their families in our community. The foundation raises funds to support special education. To learn more about this program, go to <https://factfamily.org/gap-program/>

teachers, staff, and administration; provides workshops for families; and advocates for our people. For the past 16 years, the best thing we do is hold a monthly support group for parents called "Wine and Whine." Yep. If you have to be part of our group, might as well have a little fun with it.

It was the support, encouragement, and general efforts of the people in this group that helped to secure for my son the degree of inclusion that brought him to where he is today—belonging to different groups of people who see him as a friend, a peer, a fellow student. During his grade school and high school years, we had to ask for it, advocate for it, argue for it, and just be general pests about the importance of everyone belonging. But we were also blessed with an incredibly supportive IEP team that helped to keep my son an involved and visible member of his school and our community.

We're a ways away from inclusion being the status quo and not just a "nice thing to do" or an afterthought. But we parents are important voices in creating a new paradigm where no one thinks twice or makes a fuss about inclusion. And where

exclusion becomes the aberration.

In my moments of mediocre parenting and poor parenting, and in those other brief moments of good parenting and careful listening, I have decided that I may have collected a few pearls of wisdom to pass along to anyone reading this—to help us all create a better world for all of our kids. So, here are all the things that I know now, and that I wish I had known when my son was beginning preschool:

1. Step up. Represent. Public education is underfunded. Any assistance in your child's classroom or school is always appreciated. Being a parent of a child with a disability and volunteering at school keeps us visible. That's important. Inclusion means all of us. People need to see us. Side benefit: you get to know the teachers, administrators, staff, and other parents you might otherwise not have a chance to meet!

2. Bring coffee and cookies to your child's IEP. The educators who show up for these meetings are people who have regular lives. They have to come early or stay late at their jobs just to sit through our torturously long IEP meetings. Even if the team might not be doing everything you want, at least make them feel that you are grateful and you appreciate their time and hard work on behalf of your child.

3. Enroll your child in activities. You never know what your child will excel in unless he or she is given every opportunity to succeed. My quasi-athletic son was able to get on the high school lacrosse team because our brilliantly savvy school psychologist talked to the *amazingly* agreeable and saintly coaches. It was the most rewarding experience for my son, the other players, their parents, the coaches, the other teams, and even the refs. Dressed head to toe in team swag, I can tell you I never cheered harder for any team! And on the day he made his first and only goal, my husband and I cried tears of joy with all the other parents. Those months he played lacrosse became one of the most wonderful periods of our son's high school life, and one that I will cherish forever.

4. Remove "No Way" from Your Vocabulary. I mean this. Never underestimate what is possible for your child. In fifth grade my son, raised

Catholic, decided he wanted a Bar Mitzvah. Apparently, all the cute girls at his school were Jewish, and we believe this was his motivation to join my husband's religion. The cantor and rabbi were totally open to this new addition to the Bar Mitzvah class, but they informed him that he was way behind everyone else in learning Hebrew.

By the time classes began in the fall, he was as good or even better than the other kids. I was shocked when my son admitted to converting his computer settings to Hebrew over the summer and following

Here are all the things that I know now, and that I wish I had known when my son was beginning preschool.

along in the workbook I had bought for him at Costco. Mazel Tov to him!!!

5. Join a support group (or start your own). The value in surrounding yourself with parents who are going through a similar journey cannot be overstated. Our support group, "Wine and Whine," has been going for 16 years, and talk about bonding. . . . We are family!! With each new year, we welcome parents whose kids are newly diagnosed and hold their hands through the process. Sharing what you know is a gift that keeps on giving!

6. Cry til you laugh. Who hasn't just thrown her hands in the air and laughed at the absurdity of a painful situation? The highlight of our "Wine and Whine" evening is when the parent who has the worst story of the night (and there are so many it's sometimes hard to choose) gets to wear a crown—of shells. This celebration of pain is somehow comforting and helps to normalize heartbreaking situations.

7. Become an expert. Who better to advocate for your child than an expert! The resources are voluminous, but just start somewhere!! I have found the most productive information in Twitter.

Here's how you join: Open up an account and pick a "handle." (I am @QueenBeach1.) Go to the search option and enter any topic: #autism, #Special Ed, #dyslexia, for

example, will yield hundreds of people who "Tweet" and embed super valuable articles. Click "follow."

Once you have chosen a few experts to follow, click on their account and see who they follow. Find the ones you like and follow them.

Every day you will wake up to the latest information on your chosen topic, "tweeted" by those experts you're following. (Other suggestions: @WrightNowCA, @AutismSpeaks, @Annie_Fox, @ADDitudemag, @TheCoffeeKlatch, @ParentingSpot.)

8. Create a binder. The flood of paperwork is endless and can keep you from getting a good night's sleep. Organization is key!! Purchase a big binder, a hole punch, and tabs. Make copies of everything having to do with your child: IEPs, reports from doctors, medication lists, teacher reports. Everything. Think of how good you will feel once all that paperwork is organized—and how this will help your next IEP meeting to be less painful. And more focused.

9. Look forward; then backward. I had trouble with this one. I couldn't imagine life for my son past what the goals were on his IEP. But take my sage advice: dream *big*. seek the advice of your IEP team, and look to your new Twitter friends for what is really possible. The support is there for your child's future. My college kid is a living testament to that promise.

The next step is "Backward Mapping"—figuring out where you and your child want to be, and then tracking the steps for how to get there. This is a big deal, and there is a lot of information from the Special Education Division on this and in *The EDge*.² Go for it!

10. Live in gratitude. It sounds like a cliché to say, "My child has been a blessing to me." But they all are, just in different ways. I take a deep breath. Often. I do believe that if we take that breath, pause, and look around hard enough, we can see the angels helping our kids.

We are all on this journey together, and nothing bonds a parent more than sharing our experience in raising our children. Dig in, do the work. And try on a pair of rose-colored glasses now and again. ◀

2. See especially the spring 2017 issue at https://www.calstat.org/publicattons/pdfs/2017Spring_EDge_newsletterEnglish.pdf

1st Annual Special Education Spring Dance



When: May 19th, 2018 5pm to 8pm

Where: 235 Hill St, Santa Monica

Who: All are welcome! Please RSVP to this free event:

FB.com/SpecialRockstars