



Special EDition

News of the Community Advisory Committee for Special Education

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Will special ed be a forethought, afterthought, or never thought?



Anticipation is in the air. A new superintendent and two new school board members bring with them fresh ideas and new ways of looking at things. Enrollment growth, strategic planning, and an elementary foreign language program are among the things our education leaders will be discussing as change comes to our district.

If the CAC for Special Education can have one wish fulfilled, this is what we would wish for: that the superintendent and his cabinet, principals, and the entire Board of Education will approach all their planning, deliberating, and decision-making with *active consideration* of students with disabilities. We hope the question "What about special ed?" will be asked early and often — not as an afterthought — or

worse, never even thought of at all. Consideration of special needs should be an *integral part* of every topic of discussion, whatever the topic may be: curriculum, facilities, student health, staff development, etc.

There's a tendency to think of special needs as a topic apart, but the fact is students with disabilities are everywhere, every day. One in eight students has a 504 plan or IEP for a disability, and their inclusion in classrooms with nondisabled students is the norm. Shouldn't consideration of special needs, therefore, be embedded in every conversation, every day, from the classroom to the board room?

Whenever we hear talk of serving "all kids," it's a good bet that special needs will be lost in the "all." Milk can be homogenized in a bottle but "all kids" cannot be homogenized in a classroom. To think about the needs of all kids without singling out subgroups is to overlook the needs of the subgroups.

◆ *Strategic planning.* Let there be a strong voice for special needs in the upcoming strategic planning process. Focus groups of special education parents or teachers are important, but how can their insights be propagated so that general education teachers can better serve different kinds of disabilities? How can our district go beyond just integrating students to ensuring that inclusion is meaningful for all students? How do we get people who do not know about special needs to ask about them?

◆ *Enrollment growth.* More students means more classrooms, more teachers, more desks, more of everything. The impact of growth in the district is not always as straightforward as you might think. For example, let's say there will be 500 additional elementary students. Elementary class size is 20

students. So, $500 \div 20 = 24$ new classrooms and 24 new teachers, right?

Maybe, maybe not. Counting all students together loses sight of differences. Of the 500 students, 10 or 12 will need placement in a special day class (SDC), leaving 490 general ed students, who still need 24 new classrooms and 24 new teachers.

But what about the additional SDC students? If space will be available for them in existing SDCs, no new classrooms or teachers will be needed. If space is not available, however, it's likely that a *pair* of new SDCs will be needed, for grades 2-3 and grades 4-5 so that the students will have continuous programming, just like other students. The math is simple: $24 + 2 = 26$. As overall enrollment increases, this general ed/special ed scenario is entirely predictable.

Demographers can predict how many students will live within neighborhood boundaries, but they cannot predict the type or numbers of disabilities that need special day classrooms and special education teachers in our schools. Neither can the administration. However, the administration *can* extrapolate from the total enrollment forecasts to anticipate the need for a pair of new SDCs. Question: where will the new SDCs go? Answer: at a site that does not already have SDCs. Next question: when will the next new SDC be needed? Answer: any year now.

◆ *Foreign language.* As the district looks into implementing foreign language in elementary schools (FLES), planners have the exciting job of designing FLES from scratch. All kids can benefit from a FLES program that is planned to be inclusive of all kids. PAUSD's high school language programs are designed for college-bound students, and there are no language classes for students who are capable of learning another language but not in a college-prep course. A significant number of college-bound students with disabilities (dyslexia, for example) struggle, sometimes mightily, to satisfy a language requirement. Let's not have exclusive FLES programs. Students who can

learn a first language *can* learn a second, if it's made accessible. The key to inclusion: forethought.



4th Annual CAC Sweetheart Awards

Monday February 25, 2008

7:30-8:30pm

PAUSD Board Room at 25 Churchill

Do you know a bus driver, friend, teacher, neighbor, aide, therapist, physician, volunteer or relative that has made a positive difference in the life of your child with special needs?

Help us honor these every day heroes by nominating them for a CAC Sweetheart Award. You can nominate anyone and you can nominate up to three individuals. The only requirement is that you must write a paragraph (it can be short) about each person explaining why the nominee deserves a CAC Sweetheart Award.

Send the paragraph, your name and contact information, along with the name and contact information of the person you are nominating to:



wunder @best.com

or

CAC Sweethearts - Tina Underwood

4136 Dake Avenue

Palo Alto, CA 94306

◆ ◆ ◆ El Carmelo Gives All Kids "Front Row" Access



◆ ◆ ◆ The “Twice Exceptional” Child

Challenges and Misconceptions



Lazy, bright, frustrating, and asynchronous are all words that a parent or teacher might use to describe a “Twice Exceptional” child. By definition this term is applied to children who are in some way gifted, but also may have a learning disability or behavioral issues. For example, a child can be gifted academically, musically or artistically, but be dyslexic or have Asperger’s Syndrome. Approximately 3% to 5% of children are considered gifted. However, about 1/5 of these children may have some type of learning difficulty.

In some cases, giftedness can actually delay determining a proper diagnosis of the disability for the child. Teachers and family members may see that the child is bright, but when failing academically, assume it is out of laziness or stubbornness. Sometimes the child’s giftedness can compensate for the disability, but the parent instinctually knows that he is not performing to his potential ability. The bottom line is that the twice-exceptional student is *exceptionally* complex and difficult to educate. To understand the twice-exceptional child a little better, professionals have divided the children up into 3 broad categories.

The first group of children is identified as gifted early on and their disabilities remain unidentified for a time because they are able to compensate enough to avoid a “label”. Many times this particular group of kids start having challenges when school gets harder- around the 3rd, 4th or 5th grades. Parents and teachers may believe the child is getting lazy which explains their drop in grades. Unfortunately, the child may still not have their particular disability diagnosed but just simply lose their “gifted” label. Their self confidence might take a hit and they are left to struggle without the additional services that are necessary to succeed.

The second group of children will have a disability that is severe enough to be diagnosed and addressed but their high abilities are overlooked. Their areas of strengths are not recognized and they are left unchallenged.

The third group of children, which is probably the largest, includes students whose abilities and disabilities mask each other. The child is performing

at grade level and they are simply thought of as “average”.

This is the most unidentified group of all 3 groups- as either a gifted or learning disabled. As a result, they typically do not receive services of any kind. This student is left feeling frustrated and bored when learning the tasks that come easy to them. They are confused and lose confidence when facing the challenging tasks. This undoubtedly directly impacts the student’s motivation and enthusiasm for school.

So the first challenge is to get these children identified and their specific learning disability diagnosed. It is equally important to determine their area of strength and with a thorough understanding of their giftedness. It will be critical to teach the child how to use their strengths to compensate for their weaknesses. It is also important to explain to the child exactly why some tasks are so easy and why other tasks are such a struggle. If the twice-exceptional student understands the source of his frustration, struggle or boredom, and then is taught specific strategies to use for challenging tasks, hopefully he left feeling empowered. It is critical for teachers to address areas of strength and give the student the same opportunities as other gifted students. In other words, there should be equal focus put on the child’s abilities as well as their disabilities.

Teachers and parents should remember that many twice-exceptional children respond better to visual or kinesthetic methods of learning versus the more traditional auditory method of learning. For the visual learner, using graphics, semantic maps and charts as visual aids to support the lesson being taught could be very effective. If the child is gifted in the area of music, maybe using musical chants or raps when learning something challenging could be beneficial.

Again, teaching the twice-exceptional child can be very complex. It’s impossible to take a “one size fits all approach” to these students, which is why it’s so important to know what their specific strengths and weaknesses are and tailor the educational program accordingly. It’s key that the student understand their unique learning style too considering they may have the capabilities to advocate for themselves. Self-esteem, confidence and motivation need to be boosted so that our twice-exceptional students don’t fall through the cracks.

CAC Programs: February to May 2008

All programs are at 7:30 pm in the Board Room (rear of building) at 25 Churchill (corner of El Camino)

Questions? Tina (493-5442) or Daunna (494-3712)

February 25 *4th Annual CAC Sweetheart Awards*

Come help us honor those "Every Day Heroes" who have made a difference in the life of a special needs child. This will be a joyous, heartwarming and touching event where we celebrate many deserving individuals. Refreshments will be served.

March 17 *IEP Transition Planning — High Schoolers and Parents Invited*

Your IEP should not just get you through school — it should get you ready for life after high school. The law requires an IEP Transition Plan by age 16, but that's late to start thinking about hopes, dreams, and future needs. Don't let your Transition Plan be just a piece of paper. Learn from Nancy Guerrero, "Transition Guru" at the Santa Clara County Office of Education, how to make your Transition Plan a powerful tool to develop future-oriented IEP goals and get the services you need.

April 21 *Learning Disabled for an Hour — Reservations Required!*

Curious what it's like to have a learning disability? Ever wonder why your student doesn't try harder? This hands-on simulation, designed to help parents and educators gain greater insight into the difficulties and frustration that students with learning differences encounter daily, is led by Steve Corelis, M.A., Ed. Therapist. Parents Helping Parents is our cosponsor. Space is limited. Call Daunna, 494-3712, to reserve a spot. We cannot accommodate latecomers, so please arrive early!

May 19 *Autism*

Boys are 4 x times more likely to be diagnosed with it. Today, 67 children will be diagnosed with it. In 2008, more children will be diagnosed with Autism than AIDS, diabetes and cancer combined. If you have a child with Autism, know a child with Autism, want to learn more about Autism, please attend this program!

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Palo Alto Unified School District
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