

NOVEMBER 2017 NEWSLETTER



Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC)



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Concord and Concord-Carlisle Regional Public Schools SEPAC



@concordsepac

Note to our readers: We have recently revamped our newsletter. We hope you enjoy the new format!

It has been wonderful seeing both new and familiar faces at the recent SEPAC meetings and annual Welcome Back event. We would like to express our gratitude to Jessica Murphy, Director of Special Education, and Dr. Laurie Hunter, Superintendent of the Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional School Districts, for the informative presentation and conversation at our Welcome Back event. There is so much to learn about special education and it was very helpful for those new to the system as well as those who are already familiar with the process to have this overview. For those who were unable to attend, presentation



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What is SEPAC?

We are parents and guardians of special education students who have voluntarily joined together to provide information and support to families of children in special education. As mandated by the state, each school district must have a SEPAC.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Concord and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District Special Education Parent Advisory Council is to provide education and information to parents and the broader community on special education issues and services, to establish better understanding of, respect for, and support of special education, and to work with the Concord Public Schools and Concord-Carlisle Regional School District to ensure that students' needs under Massachusetts Special Education Regulations 603 CMR 28.07(4)* and other applicable laws are being met.

slides will be available at <https://goo.gl/r62VmV> or, for the more tech-savvy, by scanning the QR code here:



Have you checked out the new blog published by students in the Pathways program at CCHS? It is wonderful! Be sure to stay up-to-date on activities and events at Pathways at <http://cchspathways.blogspot.com>

As always, please feel free to contact us with any comments or questions at concordsepac@gmail.com. We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events.



Science Alert



October was Dyslexia Awareness month. To learn more about reading interventions and dyslexia, below we review exciting new research related to these topics.

Reading to dogs increases academic attitudes

Early readers, particularly those struggling with reading, can develop negative attitudes towards academic reading. Finding ways to help children maintain a positive relationship with academic reading is critical. A recent study* by researchers at Tufts University suggests that reading to dogs as part of a reading program at school may improve children's attitudes toward reading. Second-graders with average literacy skills (as assessed by Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS)) read to a therapy dog for 30-minutes per week for a six week period. While reading skill scores did not change, children had a more positive attitude about academic reading following this program. In contrast, second-graders who completed a six-week standard classroom curriculum did not have an increased positive attitude toward reading (they also did not show any reading skill improvement). Future studies will hopefully examine whether dog-reading programs could help make school reading a positive experience for struggling readers as well.

**Linder, Mueller, Gibbs, Alper, & Freeman. Effects of an Animal-Assisted Intervention on Reading Skills and Attitudes in Second Grade Students. Early Childhood Education Journal, 2017; DOI: [10.1007/s10643-017-0862-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-017-0862-x)*

Evidence for a visual asymmetry in people with dyslexia

Though most people are not consciously aware of this, the brain does not use information from the two eyes equally; one eye is dominant. This eye dominance, or visual asymmetry, is very important as our brain very quickly processes images from each eye that are slightly different (given their ability to pick up information from slightly different locations) and seems to use this dominance to construct a unified single image of our visual world.

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 2

SEPAC Board Meeting

When: 7-8:30 PM

Where: Concord Recreation multi-purpose room

All meetings are open to the public. We encourage parents and caregivers of children on IEPs, receiving accommodations (e.g., 504 plan), or with any medical or special need to attend.

November 7

Basic Rights in Special Education Workshop

When: 7-9 PM

Where: CCHS Learning Commons

Presented by The Federation for Children with Special Needs, this free workshop provides a basic understanding of the complex special education laws and procedures. This workshop is strongly recommended if you have a child on an IEP. Co-hosted by the Concord SEPAC and the Carlisle SEPAC. All are welcome.

December 7

The Science of Reading

Difficulties-When to Say Dyslexia

When: 7-9 PM

Where: CCHS Learning Commons

Presented by Dr. Nancy Duggan from Decoding Dyslexia, this workshop is an introduction for all parents whose kids struggle to read to help them be better advocates for their child's reading skills.

To register for these workshops (for planning purposes) as well as for a complete list of all upcoming events, please visit www.concordsepac.org.

A recent study* found that, in contrast to adults without dyslexia, adults with dyslexia do not have a dominant eye, meaning that the brain uses information from both eyes equally in interpreting the visual world. How can this visual symmetry potentially lead to challenges? The researchers theorize that using slightly competing information from each eye could potentially contribute to challenges differentiating left and right as well as to mirror image errors when viewing letters. These results contribute to our understanding of the underlying basis for the challenges experienced by people with dyslexia and will hopefully assist in developing helpful accommodations and/or interventions.

**Le Floch & Ropars. Left –right asymmetry of the Maxwell spot centroids in adults without and with dyslexia. Proc. R. Soc. B, 2017.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1098/rspb.2017.1380>*



Adaptive and Inclusive Activities

For some families, it can be difficult to find fun extracurricular activities in a supportive environment. Concord Recreation's Assistant Recreation Director Anna Wood attended our September meeting to present information and answer questions about the new large variety of adaptive and inclusive activities available through Concord Recreation. Classes/clubs include music, mindfulness, martial arts, dance, and a variety of sports, as well as several social clubs with themes such as Pokémon or Dungeons and Dragons. These classes typically have fewer participants, more breaks, and visual schedules, when possible. Anna Wood is a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist and welcomes questions/comments about these programs and/or specific adaptations and accommodations (awood@concordma.gov). For more information, please visit <http://concordrec.com/504/Adaptive-Recreation>.



Family Engagement Survey

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is surveying families of students with an IEP to determine how well your child's school is communicating with you and promoting your engagement in your child's education.

You can complete the survey online or using a mobile device,

<http://www.surveymizmo.com/s3/3792854/Family-Engagement-Survey-2017-2018>

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Find out how you can get involved by visiting concordsepac.org/volunteer-opportunities or coming to our next meeting.



DID YOU KNOW?

? If you are an individual with a developmental disability or a family member and/or guardian of an individual with a developmental disability, you may be eligible to receive up to \$250 to help you attend MA conferences/events geared towards increasing knowledge about rights and ability to advocate and/or assist in gaining independence through the **Massachusetts Council Empowerment Funds Program**. For more information, please visit: <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/council-empowerment-funds-program>

? In 2015, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) issued a policy letter providing information and guidance regarding implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for specific learning disability. The **Dear Colleague** letter detailed the "importance of addressing the unique educational needs of children with specific learning disabilities resulting from dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia during IEP Team meetings and other meetings with parents under IDEA." The full letter can be found here: <https://goo.gl/rZTi8L>