

Special Ed News

Westport Public Schools . Volume 2

Who we are...

The Westport PTA SpEd Committee has two representatives from each school and our Co-Chairs sit on the PTA Council. We work as an advisory committee within the Westport Public School System to ensure quality services for our children with special needs. Like you, we are parents of children who receive special education services. We know that sometimes it is nice to be able to talk to someone with similar experiences. We are here to listen and provide support if we can.

Due to confidentiality laws our schools are prevented from giving out names of special education families. In order to find out more about SpEd Parents, or to learn the answers to your special education questions, please contact us. If you would like to be added to our growing email list please email Sharuna Mahesh at sharunam@gmail.com

WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!

This year so far...

- ▶ Members on our committee have worked with various organizations to develop programs for our kids and provide parents with information to help our kids, these organizations include Earthplace, Westport Y and Smart Kids with Learning Disabilities.
- ▶ The Westport PTA SpEd Committee has organized monthly Sip 'n Chats which have been well attended.
- ▶ Fall coffees at each school focused on different topics such as Social and Emotional Awareness, what is it and how to reinforce this at home; Technology and Homework and Balancing Life and School: the importance of leisure time with our kids.
- ▶ Community Fun Day was held in November for children in Pre-K to Grade 8, we had a great turnout and a lot of support from the community.
- ▶ We held our first Teen Movie Night in November for children with

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special needs in Grades 6 to 12, we had peer buddies at the event and Best Buddies from Staples High School was there to help. Our next Teen Night is scheduled for April 29th at the Westport Y from 7:30pm to 9:30pm.

- ▶ A presentation on sleep away camps for children with special needs of varying levels was held on March 6th at 7pm, at the Westport Y.
- ▶ One of our goals this year was to work with administration on Post High School Transition offerings and get this information out to parents. The Westport Public School will be hosting 2 presentations in the A Guide to Transition series, the first one is titled Transition Bill of Rights and will be held on March 29th, the second one is Building a Bridge Between High School and Adult Service Agencies and will be held on April 6th (more information about these talks later in the newsletter), we highly recommend that parents Grade 6 to 12 attend this presentation.
- ▶ Our annual district wide Spring Coffee will be held on April 20th at the Westport Arts Center. The topic for this year is Executive Functioning.

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SUMMER IS COMING! WHAT IS EXTENDED YEAR SERVICES (ESY)?

Some children with disabilities require special education and related services longer than the usual school year in order to receive FAPE. Extended School Year (ESY) services are special education and/or related services provided beyond the usual school year, at times when school is not usually in session - typically during the summer.

ESY services are different from summer school, summer remedial classes, and summer enrichment programs. ESY services are individualized, based on the child's needs as documented in the IEP, and are free of charge to parents.

Decisions about whether your child will receive ESY services and what services he/she will receive will be made by your child's IEP team. You are a member of the IEP team. An IEP meeting is held to consider your child's needs for ESY services. This meeting must be conducted like any other IEP meeting with appropriate prior notice.

You, the child's teacher(s), related service providers, or administrators may request an IEP team meeting to consider your child's need for ESY services!

If these services are not already part of your child's IEP, you need to consider whether they would be necessary to meet his/her unique needs. If so, you should consider convening an IEP meeting to revise the IEP to include these services. If you have any questions about ESY, talk to your school's VP.

FROM THE DESK OF MIKE RIZZO, DIRECTOR OF PUPIL SERVICES

Dear Parents and Guardians,

A primary goal of public education is to prepare students for a productive and meaningful life after high school. We recognize that this path can vary greatly by individual and that there are many paths students might take. Within our school system, school staff members and families work together as students move through our middle grades and high school years to teach students the skills they need to successfully access their pathway. For students with disabilities, this planning takes on additional importance and attention, as it is part of the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and is referred to as Transition planning. Connecticut has recently developed two documents, among its many Transition resources, that guide teams in their work: [The Connecticut Core Transition Skills](#) and the [Transition Bill of Rights for Students Receiving Special Education Services](#).

The Transition Bill of Rights requires that the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) begin transition planning for a student no later than the student's 16th birthday and that planning include services through the student's graduation or age 21 as appropriate to meet the student's transition goals. Because these goals are individualized, student input to this planning is required and is an important part of the process. Consider, for example, a student with a learning disability who intends to enroll in a four year college after high school graduation. This student's goals may include skills necessary for success in college and competitive employment, such as planning long term assignments, time management strategies, self-advocacy skills to engage the appropriate supports when help is required, and the student gaining an understanding of his/her disability so that the student can be successful. Another student, for example, may have cognitive and physical disabilities, and the PPT may determine the student's goal to be supported employment through the Department of Development Services (DDS) after the student's high school experience. Goals for this student may include specific vocational training, self-care that promotes independence in activities of daily living, and social skills so that the student can develop relationships in the workplace and within the community. As one can see, the planning done by the PPT is important and individualized and is ultimately grounded in the achievement of the student's goals.

The Connecticut Core Transition Skills document has been recently developed by the Connecticut Bureau of Special Education's Transition Task Force to guide transition planning within the IEP for students with disabilities. As is the case with any IEP, it is important for the PPT to consider the individual needs of the student. For example, using the students above to demonstrate this idea, the Core Transition Skills lists the ability to demonstrate the use of technology for learning and community involvement. The student mentioned above attending a four year college may learn the necessary computer skills to reach the student's goals as part of the general education curriculum, while the latter student may need more specialized instruction in technology, such as using a speech generating device to communicate with members of the community.

Westport's approach to supporting students in their Transition goals continues to be highly individualized and delivered through a continuum of services. Resources for families are made available through the PPT process, including the Transition Bill of Rights and the [Building a Bridge booklet](#) developed by the CT BSE which describes the Transition process. Additionally, post high school planning is discussed through the Staples High School Guidance Department in various parent meetings, classroom based lessons for students, and 1:1 meetings with counselors. Resources include the [2016-17 Guide for Post High School and College Applications](#) which provides an overview of this process at SHS, as well as an informative brochure [Learning Differences and High School Planning](#) developed by our Guidance Department.

On behalf of the professionals working within our schools, we look forward to our continued collaboration and partnership with you in meeting the individual needs of your children.

Sincerely,

Mike Rizzo

Westport Transition Series

Preparing students for life after high school is a very important part of public school education. For students eligible for special education services, this preparation requires additional planning. Below is an invitation to two important and exciting presentations developed by Westport Public Schools staff to help parents of students eligible for special education services understand the process for their children as they transition to life after high school.

A GUIDE TO TRANSITION: Understanding the Transition Bill of Rights

This presentation is designed to provide parents an overview of the transition process from school to post-secondary life and the supports in place for students along the way.

THIS IS OPEN TO ALL PARENTS OF STUDENTS RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES IN GRADES 6-12.

**STAPLES HIGH SCHOOL
LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER CLASSROOM
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29, 2017
9:00- 10:00 AM**

A GUIDE TO TRANSITION: Building a Bridge Between High School and Adult Service Agencies

This presentation is designed for parents of students that will require support from an adult agency such as the Department of Developmental Services or the Bureau of Rehabilitative Services after leaving high school. If you have any questions about whether or not this presentation is appropriate for you to attend, please contact your child's case manager or the special education administrator in your child's building.

**STAPLES HIGH SCHOOL
LIBRARY MEDIA CENTER CLASSROOM
THURSDAY, APRIL 6, 2017
7:00-8:30 PM**

"So you think you want to go to college after HS? What you should be doing NOW to prepare

Ms. Debra Fairchild, from the Southern CT. State University, Disability Support Center, will present information, strategies and processes that HS students and their parents should know and understand to make the transition from HS to College life. Mr. BoZamphir of the SCSU Center for Technology (CAT LAB) will review high and low tech hardware and software that students can use to improve their performance in and out of the classroom

**THURSDAY, MARCH 30 TH 2017 AT 6:00 PM - RESCHEDULED TO TUESDAY, APRIL 18TH
FAIRFIELD WARDE HIGH SCHOOL**

LIFE AFTER SCHOOL . . . IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY TO START PLANNING

Visit the State's website for information and resources on [Life After School](#), some links included below.

[Stepping Forward: A Self-Advocacy Guide for Middle and High School Students](#)

[Building a Bridge: A Resource Manual for High School Students](#)

[Charting the LifeCourse](#)

From the Commission's Corner

On July 19, 2016, The Town of Westport's Representative Town Meeting (RTM), unanimously approved an ordinance establishing a new Westport Commission for people with Disabilities. Following a survey, a 96% favorable rating followed and an awareness was brought to the Town's attention, by Barbara Butler, former director of Human Services, stating 20% of our Town's population is directly affected by their own, or a family members physical or intellectual disability.

By early January, 2017, Westport 1st Selectman, Jim Marpe, announced appointments to the new commission. Members include Jim Ross - Chairman of the Board, Marina Derman, Diane Johnson, LuAnn Guinta, Stacie Curran, Tom Holleman, & Evan Levinson, its members. The Commission's Mission statement notes, "Westport is a Town where people with disabilities have the equal opportunity and support to enjoy full and equal access to lives of independence, productivity, inclusion, and self determination."

Based on survey data, the Commission will begin its focus on seven areas of public concern: Transportation & Mobility, Housing & Emergency Preparedness, Employment & Life Transition, Health & Fitness, Recreation & Social activities, Education & Personal development, Federal/ State & Local Policy. The Commission meets publicly, the 3rd Thursday of every month at Westport Town Hall, 8:30am Rm 201.

SPRING EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

District-wide Spring Coffee

SAVE THE DATE! The topic for our annual district-wide spring coffee will be Executive Functioning

THURSDAY, APRIL 20TH
9:30AM
WESTPORT ARTS CENTER

Sip n Chat

Join us to chat, exchange ideas, & ask questions with other special ed parents. We meet at Panera Bread (next to Home Goods). Our next few meeting dates are below, no need to RSVP.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5TH, AT 9:30AM AT PANERA BREAD
THURSDAY, MAY 11TH, AT 9:30AM AT PANERA BREAD
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 7TH, AT 9:30AM AT PANERA BREAD

Teen Fun Night

Come to our Teen Fun night at the Westport Y. This will mimic the monthly teen night that the Y holds for all teens in Westport.

This is a drop off event for children receiving special education in Westport (Grades 6 to 12 only).

Snacks will be available for \$1 each.

Best Buddies and S.L.O.B.S. will provide peer support!

RSVP to Stacie Curran at stacieace@gmail.com or Merrily Bodell at mzbodell@gmail.com

SATURDAY, APRIL 29TH
7:30PM - 9:30PM
WESTPORT Y

You likely have heard of the term "Assistive Technology" or its acronym "AT". So, what is it exactly?

According to the Connecticut Assistive Technology Guidelines, Assistive Technology is anything that helps a child with a disability perform a skill or participate in an activity (Campbell, Milbourne and Wilcox, 2008).

Some AT devices that you might have encountered are pencil grips, apps, computer programs, slant boards, wheel chairs, remote controls and even eyeglasses. You might ask, "Are eyeglasses AT?" Yes, eyeglasses are an AT device. Eyeglasses help people with a vision disability perform a skill (such as reading or driving a car.)

For a student who has trouble reading text in school because of their disability (reading disability or vision impairment) there are now many compensatory devices that can help her/him read text (perform the skill) such as:

Read&Write Google Chrome Extension - This chrome extension has free text to speech (TTS) and is available to anyone who uses Google Chrome. The student highlights the text and the app will read the text to the student. The upgraded version has a dictionary, picture dictionary, prediction software, recorder, voice notes, and highlighting capabilities for note taking. Westport District has licenses for the upgraded version.

Bookshare.org (which is subsidized by the Dept. of Education) has 500,000 books which are free to any student with a documented reading disability. The library can be accessed by the app VoiceDream on iPad and iPhones. Check out Bookshare's site for other apps that will allow access to their library for Chromebooks, Mac, Androids and PCs.

Gutenberg Library has 50,000 books (many classics) that can be read by Captivoice. The Gutenberg Library is free to everyone and the lite version of Captivoice is also free. Go to captivoice.com to try out the free books in the Gutenberg library.

Rewordify.com is a free language simplifier on the web. A student can paste English text or even a webpage link into Rewordify and a simpler version will appear. There are classic books (top left) and public documents that have been simplified.

Co-Writer - prediction (word suggestion) writing software is very useful for a student who has reading/spelling difficulties. It contains a 40,000-word dictionary, word-banks, and word-topics and works together with email, Google docs, MS word and web browsers. This software also reads back what the student type. <http://donjohnston.com/cowriter/> There is a free trial available (without using your credit card). While you are at the site, check out the library of Start-to-Finish books designed for older students who read at a lower grade level.

Learn more about Assistive Technology at Connecticut State Department's website <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2663&q=334974>

CLICK BELOW FOR INFORMATION ON LOCAL SPRING AND SUMMER PROGRAMS

[SPRING PROGRAMS](#)

[SUMMER PROGRAMS](#)