

Georgetown ISD Special Education Community Advisory Council (SECAC)



Assistant
From the Director's Chair

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the new school year! I hope that you and your student(s) had a great start to what I think will be an exciting year in GISD. Not only are there new things happening within the district, but federal guidelines have also changed with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), 2004. While there are quite a few changes in IDEA, there are several which you as parents may notice early this Fall. Several changes affect the ARD process and attendance at ARD meetings. One such change is that there will be times in which a committee will not have to meet in order to change or amend a previous ARD. With prior agreement and written consent of both a parent and school representatives, an ARD may be modified without holding a meeting in order to make changes such as adding goals or objectives, changing instructional accommodations, or changing a date when a service begins. Another change is that an ARD member may be excused from attending an ARD meeting in certain circumstances. One example would be if an ARD meeting is being held but one member's area of curriculum or related service is not being discussed; another would be if a member is unable to attend but has submitted his input in writing prior to the meeting. In both instances the parent and the school must give prior written consent to excuse the member from attending. Other changes in IDEA 2004 include additional IEP components, eligibility criteria, behavior and manifestation determination, and the resolution of disagreements. IDEA can be found on line at the Texas Education Agency website at www.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed.

Please feel free to ask your campus Special Education Coordinator or ARD Facilitator any questions you might have regarding the new IDEA and it's implementation here in Georgetown I.S.D. Stephanie and I wish you the best school year yet, and we look forward to serving our students, families, and teachers this year.

Sincerely,
Regina Gilchrist
GISD Assistant Director Special Education



GISD Community Forum News

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SECAC is very excited to be part of the team presenting the GISD Community Forums for 2005-2006. As you will see on the pullout schedule in your newsletter, the number of sessions have increased and now include more regular education subjects. Also, the Sibbs Network is back and the Autism Spectrum Parent Network is starting up again. (See articles on page 5.)

We hope you were able to attend our first Forum which featured our Superintendent, Mr. Joe Dan Lee. Our school district is really on the move and we all need to do our part to support the new Bond being proposed in November.

There will be pizza and drinks prior to the breakout sessions and childcare provided by GISD staff. (Refreshments and childcare are free of charge.)

We look forward to seeing you this year!

SECAC Mission Statement

The GISD Special Education Community Advisory Council will provide education, outreach, communication, networking, advisory, and advocacy services to its stakeholders including: families, students, community, GISD staff, school board, inter-agencies, and local businesses, in accordance with established guidelines and reflecting positive feedback and support from stakeholder groups.

Parent to Parent

Before we begin our talk, I have a question for you. Since school began, have you received your letter from your student's **Case Manager**? If your answer is no, **immediately** call the Special Ed Coordinator for your campus:

Annie Purl Elem - Michele Murphy 943-5000 x6812
Frost Elem - Leslie Hans 943-5000 x6272
Pickett Elem - Carole Pinkham 943-5000 x6547
Cooper Elem - Lindy Frazer 943-5000 x6649
Ford Elem - Becky Butscher 943-5000 x7950
Benold MS - Syl Champion 943-5000 x6998 or x6922
Ninth Grade Center - Sheila Allison 943-5000 x7347

Carver Elem - Carole Pinkham 943-5000 x6746
McCoy Elem - Cheryl Crawley 943-5000 x6328
Williams Elem - Lu Lara-Valdez 943-5000 x7809
Village Elem - Leslie Hans 943-5000 x7413
Tippit MS - Ann Budke 943-5000 x6493
Forbes MS - Janet Stuart 943-5000 x7764
GHS - Ken May 943-5000 x7126 / Ron Jones 943-5000 x7122

I'll discuss the Case Manager's role more thoroughly in the next Newsletter, but it is truly the foundation of the relationship you and your student's Special Ed team will form each year.

I feel so alone! All parents who have children with special needs feel this way at one time or another. All areas of dealing with your child will seem so different from what others are experiencing. But the absolutely great news is that **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**. Even here in Georgetown, there are almost 900 students that fall under the Special Education umbrella. That means 900+ Special Ed parents, siblings, guardians, etc., just here in our school district! But, how do you find these other people? Within GISD we have the Special Ed Council (SECAC), the GISD Community Forum held each month, within the Forums there is a Special Ed Siblings group forming, as well as a Parent Network for students within the Autism Spectrum. Being formed as we speak is a Special Ed parent network that will reside at each campus and across the district. This newsletter addresses all of these areas and gives you contact information. If you feel there is a particular group that needs to discuss topics specific to a disability, contact me and we'll get it into the Forum. There are many conferences and support groups around the Austin area whose information I have to pass along. And if you just need someone to talk to, for whatever reason, call me. That's why I'm here. Remember, **YOU ARE NOT ALONE!**

Effective vs. Ineffective Communication. Please don't think I am questioning your ability to communicate. On the contrary, it's all about "the corporate ladder". But you ask, "What corporation? We're talking about my student and GISD"? Well, even though it is a lot more personable than a corporation, our school district still needs to run as a business in order to handle almost 9000 students, millions of dollars in budget, and hundred of employees. So, with that in mind, if you find yourself facing an obstacle with your student, here is the calling order for the most effective communication:

Your student's Case Manager _____ (phone number)
Your student's campus Special Ed Coordinator _____ (see phone numbers above)
Your student's campus Principal _____ (phone number)
Stephanie Blanck (GISD Special Ed Director) – 943-5000 x6043
Joe Dan Lee (GISD Superintendent) – 943-5000 x5015

Again, let me emphasize that even though this may seem like a "well, duh" discussion, I have seen discussions go very wrong, very quickly, because the parent gets frustrated and tries to jump straight to the top of the ladder. Also, by narrowing your list to just your student's Case Manager and Special Ed Coordinator, you are not going through the frustration of talking to the voice mails of several teachers, maybe a secretary or two, and then administrators. It is very easy to let our frustrations escalate when we feel that we are being ignored. This is usually not the case. Place your call to the professional and then please wait for 24 hours before going to the next level. And once you have spoken to the professional, give them sufficient time to resolve the problem before going to the next level. If you are truly being ignored or your obstacle is not going away, then start calling the administrators. **BUT**, let me give you some advice parent to parent, when you walk into an administrator's office, you need to present that person with the issue at hand and let them ask you the questions to fill in blanks as needed. Again, I have experienced parents going off subject so often that the actual problem gets lost in the discussion and both administrator and parent end up frustrated with very little to nothing being resolved. I am available to you at any level of your discussions with GISD personnel. 90+% of what I experience with parents is based either on miscommunication or lack of communication. These are so easy to resolve and will save you, your student and your student's team a lot of unnecessary anxiety.

Survey. Last, but not least, Stephanie Blanck is willing to offer a four-week training entitled Special Education 101. These classes will be once a week and in the evening. This will be an excellent opportunity to learn about a very complex system. (We do have a one night offering of Special Ed 101 during the November Forum, but this will be very high level.) If you feel you can make the commitment to the four classes, please call Joy Bohanan at 943-5008 and give her your name and number. No exact date has been set for these classes as of now.

Until next time, Dawn Jennings, 943-5000 x4805

Meet the GISD Special Education Staff

Special Education Behavior Specialists

The GISD Behavior Specialists are responsible for consultation, planning, and goal development for providing appropriate intervention suggestions designed to enhance the student in acquiring functional and appropriate social skills needed to participate in and benefit from the educational environment, and to help the student perform independently in society.

Some of the Behavior Specialists responsibilities include:

- * Coordinate the activities and services provided within the GISD Behavior Support classrooms (SOAR)
- * Visit each behavior classroom the equivalent of one full day per week on a pre-determined basis.
- * Coordinates services provided to students with the Autism spectrum.
- * Conduct parent training as needed for students with Autism.
- * Conduct parent training as needed for students with behavioral issues which interfere with success at school and home.
- * Conduct or schedules in-home training as deemed appropriate by the ARD committee.
- * Attend ARD committee meetings and other staffings/meetings as appropriate.
- * Assists teachers in coordinating behavioral goals with the instructional programs.
- * Keeps informed about new state and federal guidelines and policies concerning behavior and discipline in the schools.
- * Confers with parents, teachers, students and/or principals for the purpose of interpretation of behavioral assessment data, recommended modifications, and student progress and behavior.
- * Works closely with the school campus in developing appropriate schedules for students.
- * Will assist/consult with campus staff in writing behavior improvement plans.
- * Will assist and model social skills classes as needed.
- * Will set up on-going discussions with parents, teachers and administrators to assess the needs regarding behavior on the campus.

My name is Annette McCarty and I am the Autism Specialist for all our students in GISD. My background is in Speech Pathology and I have worked as a Speech/ Language Pathologist for the district for the past five years. I have also worked in the private sector and as an in-home service provider. My passion is in the area of Autism Spectrum Disorders. I have created and co-taught the *Let's Make Friends* summer program, designed to facilitate social communication and behavior capabilities in our students with autism. I participate in the autism evaluation team and enjoy learning about new assessments and intervention techniques. My philosophy in reaching children with autism is we must inspire creative programming and individualized attention across disciplines in order to meet the specific needs of each child. The most rewarding, challenging, and exciting part of my job as a Speech Pathologist has been working with our students with autism, and now I have the opportunity to do that full time. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with parents and staff to assist in seeing each child reach their full potential.



Pictured left to right: Patricia Jackson, Pam Reynolds and Annette McCarty



My name is Patricia Jackson and I am the Trouble Shooter for our GISD students. I will pick up the students that do not fall under the Autism Spectrum or SOAR. I completed my under-graduate studies at Southwestern University with a B.S. in Education in 1975 and a Masters of Education in 1983 from Texas State University. I am currently in my 30th year of education, 28 of which have been in GISD. I taught regular ed elementary, elementary resource, developed and taught in SOAR classrooms in 1992-1994. I have been in my current position as a Behavior Specialist for 11 years.

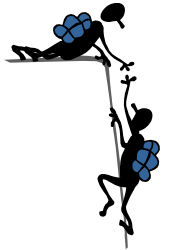
I live in Georgetown with my husband and have 2 daughters in college: Kendra at TCU and Lacy at UT.

My name is Pam Reynolds and this is my 16th year working with the behaviorally challenged in Special Education at GISD. It is my second year as a Behavior Specialist. I received my Bachelors degree from Tarleton State University and my Special Education Certification and Behavior Coach Endorsement from Region XIII Service Center. I've lived in Georgetown for 27 years. I have two sons, a daughter and son-in-law and two awesome grandchildren. This year as SOAR Behavior Specialist, I look forward to supporting the SOAR service throughout the district through proactive collaboration with the administrators, staff, parents and most important students.

Meet the GISD Special Education Staff

GISD Parent Liaisons

In 2004, two new positions were added to the Special Education staff in GISD. Eliana Case became the GISD Parent Liaison for 504 and Childfind. Dawn Jennings became the GISD Parent Liaison for Special Education. The GISD Parent Liaisons are available to the parents and staff of GISD to assist in matters that include education, communication, and facilitation of issues in the areas of 504, Childfind and Special Ed. Eliana has a son who is part of the 504 program and she now has 17 years of experience with the ups and downs of 504. She also worked with the Head Start program before coming on board with GISD. Dawn Jennings has a son with Autism and now has 18 years experience with Special Education. The Parent Liaisons are a bridge between GISD staff and parents. Whether it is a matter of miscommunication or misunderstanding of the very complex 504 and Special Ed systems, the Parent Liaisons can assist in finding the personnel and educational means to help the staff and parents. If you need more information or would like to talk to a Parent Liaison, please don't hesitate to call Eliana at 943-5000 x4807 or Dawn at 943-5000 x4805.



SECAC News

What's a SECAC? Have you ever wondered who is behind the SECAC Newsletter you receive quarterly, the GISD Community Forums, or other Special Education functions that happen in Georgetown? Well, there is a good chance that if has anything to do with Special Ed, then the Special Education Community Advisory Council (SECAC) is somehow involved. The Council is made up of Special Ed parents, GISD Special Ed Professionals and community members who have a vested interest in our students with special needs. A new set of By-Laws were just adopted in August and by the next Newsletter, a new mission statement will be in place. The Council is first and foremost in place to research and discuss issues that are affecting our Special Ed students and make recommendations to our Special Ed Director. The Council is also a venue for making sure that parents receive information and education opportunities concerning our students with special needs. The Council formed in the Fall of 2002 and is looking forward to many more years of working with GISD and the community to make this world a great place for ALL our children.

Interested in joining the Council? If you find yourself with lots of what many of us refer to as "nervous energy" when it comes to wanting to make a difference for your child and other children with special needs, then the Council is a great way to make a difference. We are currently looking for Special Ed parents and community members to join our Council. We meet every month (except December and July) on the last Tuesday of the month. Our next meetings will be September 27, October 25 and November 29. We meet at the GISD Central Office on Lakeway from 6:30 - 8:00 pm. Feel free to drop in and attend a meeting or call Dawn Jennings at 943-5000 x4805 for more information.

Elementary Lifeskills Program - In the Spring of 2005, the Council was approached by the Special Ed Director and asked to research the feasibility of not having a Lifeskills program at every elementary campus and what would be the pros and cons of having our Lifeskills students on fewer campuses. After having several meetings within the Council, a questionnaire was sent to the elementary Lifeskills parents and a public meeting was held to discuss the issue. After all assessments were complete, the Council proceeded to recommend to the Director that the children, parents and staff would benefit from having fewer Lifeskills programs in place in the Elementary schools. For the 2005-2006 school year, the campuses with Lifeskills programs include:

Annie Purl Elementary and Ford Elementary - PPCD through second
Pickett Elementary and McCoy Elementary - third through fifth

Some of the benefits of this move include allowing the students to start meeting other peers within the Lifeskills program, allowing parents of Lifeskills students to start networking on the same campus, less travel needed by itinerant staff between campuses, and bringing together professionals who specialize in working with Lifeskills students.

GISD Community Forum News

Sibs Network

The Sibs Network is a mentoring program that matches older students with disabled siblings with younger students with similarly disabled siblings. Siblings of children with disabilities have a lot to offer each other. They have many life experiences that are different from their peers, and often are surprised to find how much they have in common with each other. Siblings can share how to cope with the challenges and emotions that commonly are a part of their lives, as well as how to celebrate the great things that have been added to their lives by their brother or sister. The goal of this program is to provide a fun place for supportive friendships to develop and for sharing to take place.

The Sibs Network is currently looking for nominees. If you know of a younger student with a disabled sibling who would benefit from this program or an older sibling who has a lot to offer, please email Christie Wilke or Dawn Jennings. Include the student's name and any other helpful information you have to help us reach them (school, age, sibling's name).

Primary Contact:
Christie Wilke, LSSP
GISD Special Education Counselor
wilkec@georgetown.txed.net
943-5000 ext 6411

Backup Contact:
Dawn Jennings
SECAC President
jenningsd@georgetown.txed.net
943-5000 x4805

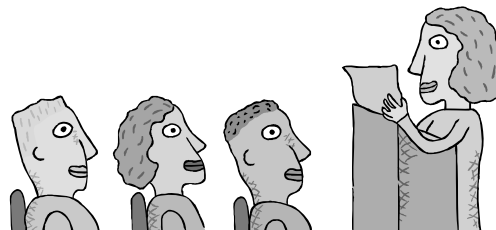
Autism Spectrum Parent Networking

Our new Autism Behavior Specialist, Annette McCarty, will be facilitating the Autism Spectrum Parent Networking sessions during the 2005-2006 Community Forums. Annette is very excited to be working with the parents during the Forums. She would like to spend the first session (October) introducing herself, getting to know the parents and discussing potential topics for the other sessions. This networking group is open to all adults who have an interest in the Autism Spectrum, not just parents. It is an excellent opportunity to learn new information about Autism and to meet other adults with similar interests.

For more information, please contact:

Primary Contact:
Annette McCarty
GISD Special Education Behavior Specialist
Mccartya@georgetown.txed.net
943-5000 x6669

Backup Contact:
Dawn Jennings
SECAC President
jenningsd@georgetown.txed.net
943-5000 x4805



SAVE THE DATE!

Thursday, September 29, 2005
Georgetown High School Library, 5:00-8:00 p.m.

GISD Special Education Department presents “Transitioning Your Student from Birth to Life”

Information will be available from DARS, Advocacy Inc., MHMR/Bluebonnet Trail, ARCIL (Social Security), and Georgetown Businesses who work with GISD assisting our students

6:00-6:45 p.m. will be a presentation on Transitioning from PPCD through Graduation with information on the programs currently in place and the vision for the near future

7:00-8:00 p.m. will be a presentation on Legal Issues including Guardianship, Power of Attorney, the Military Draft, Social Security, and State-issued identification

Food and childcare will be available at no cost

For more information, call Susan Upshaw at 943-5000 x7124



Speech Therapist,
Penny Mican

Breaking News!!!

GISD Speech Therapist, Penny Mican, was awarded the FRED award from Frost Elementary Principal, Alma Guzman. The FRED award is given to those individuals who believe and demonstrate that::

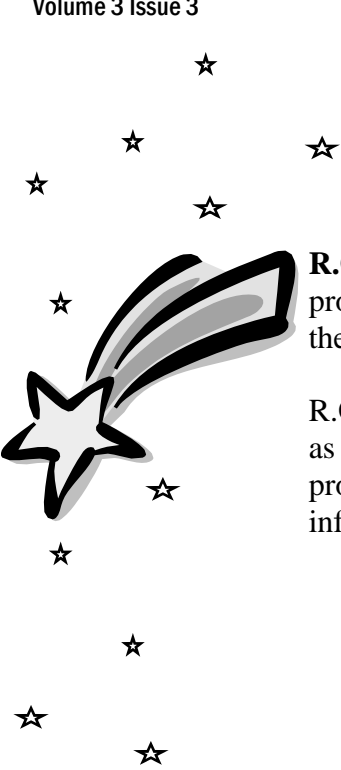
**Everyone makes a difference.
Everything is built on relationships.
You must continually create value for others, and it doesn't have to
cost a penny.
You can reinvent yourself regularly.**

Way to go Penny!!



Our Student Stars—Regional Softball Tournament

On June 29, there was a HUGE article in the Williamson Sun about our own GYBA Skippy’s and their playing host to an All-Star Game in Georgetown. Teams came from Round Rock, Belton, and Austin to participate. Pictures in the article included our own Student Stars: Kristie Dorsett, Jared Friemel, Dylan Hill, and Kayla Pautzke. It was a wonderful article and sounded like a super event. Way to go team!



★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Our Community — R.O.C.K.

R.O.C.K, Ride On Center for Kids is a non-profit organization in Georgetown, created to provide clients in Williamson and surrounding counties safe, affordable hippotherapy, therapeutic riding, and related education programs.

R.O.C.K is dedicated to providing physical, emotional, social, and educational skills, as well as self-esteem, working with local medical, educational, public, and social agencies and professionals. For more information, call 512-930-ROCK or visit their website at info@rockride.org.

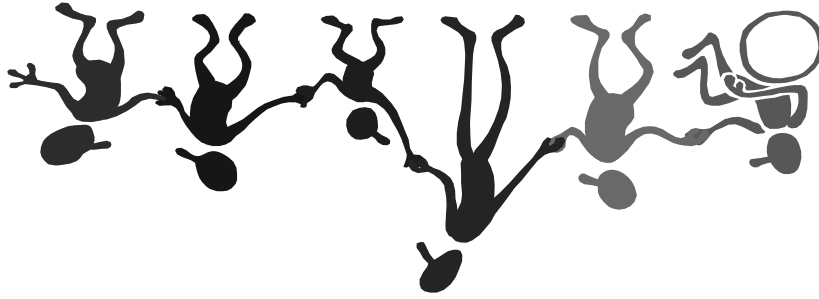


“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.”
 - Helen Keller

The Let’s Make Friends program visits R.O.C.K. during the summer

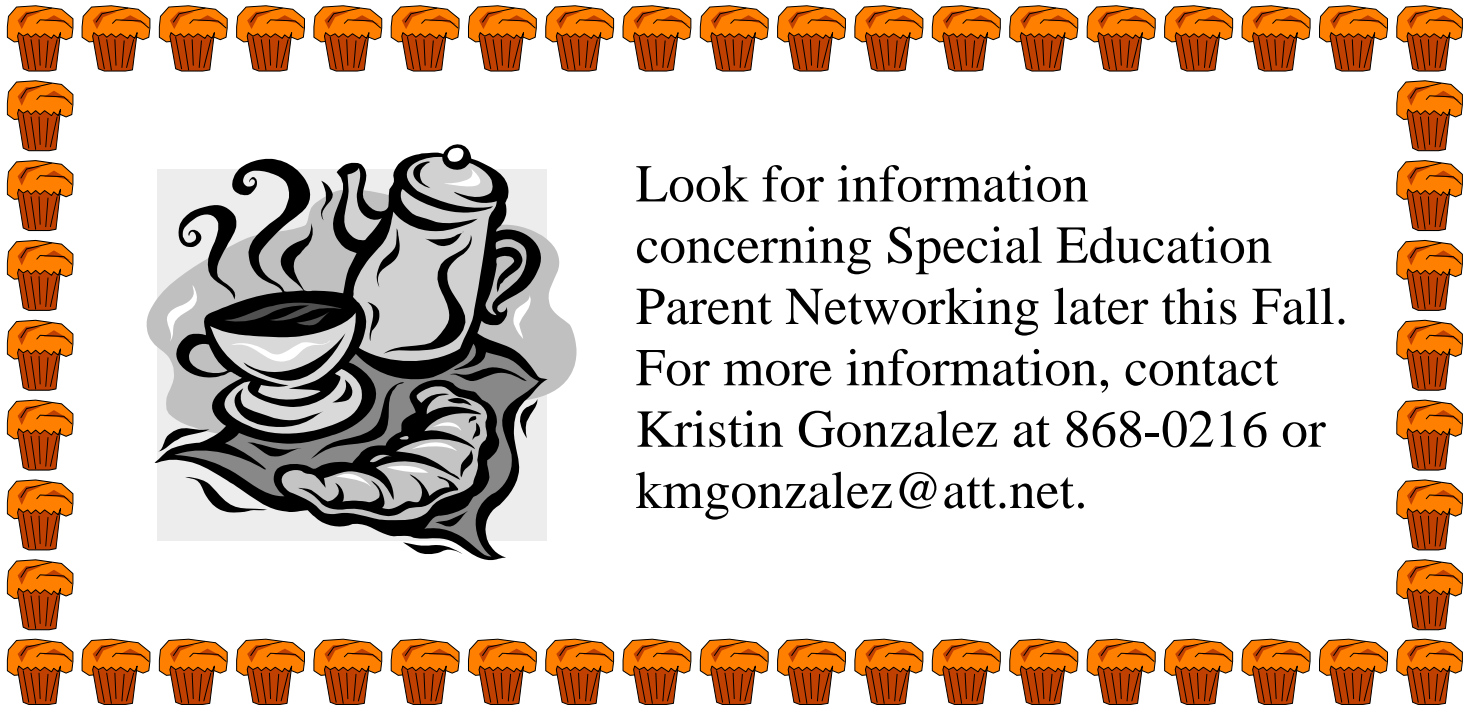
As reported from one of our Special Education Parents - “ “Check the labels at the gate” is the unofficial motto at R.O.C.K. Regardless of a student’s age, diagnosis or (dis)ability, every student is made successful every time. There are no test scores here. No judgments, no stares, no social standards of “normal” behavior, and – by far the worst! – no pity. The staff and volunteers at R.O.C.K. don’t just accept their students for who they are, they honor them. As a parent and a volunteer, becoming a part of R.O.C.K. is one of the most rewarding things our family has ever done.”

-- Kristin Gonzalez



Georgetown Independent School District
Special Education Director
603 Lakeway Drive
Georgetown, TX 78628
(512) 943-5000 x 6043

Special Education Community
Advisory Council (SECAC)



Look for information concerning Special Education Parent Networking later this Fall. For more information, contact Kristin Gonzalez at 868-0216 or kmgonzalez@att.net.