

Georgetown ISD Special Education Community Advisory Council (SECAC)



From the Director's Chair

In December 2004, the federal government passed the **INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION IMPROVEMENT ACT – 2004**. It became law as of July 1, 2005 and replaced IDEA '97. As of this writing, the regulations have not been distributed from the Department of Education so until that happens; IDEA '97 is still in effect in some sections. The spirit of IDEIA '04, aside from aligning with No Child Left Behind (NCLB), is to build better collaboration and communication between schools and parents.

In this writing, I would like to outline some of the changes that pertain to ARD meetings. IDEIA '04 has given the school and parents opportunities for decision making **OUTSIDE** of formal ARD meetings in the school setting. You may have already seen a new form called **ARD AMENDMENT/ MODIFICATION AGREEMENT**. This form may be used for the following reasons to modify, correct, or change information on the last Annual ARD:

- Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance
- Annual Goals or Short-term Objectives
- Instructional Accommodations
- Date when services will begin
- Adjustments to Decisions within the State Assessment System such as needed accommodations, instructional level to be tested, or achievement level expectation.

The school is required to discuss the proposed change with the parent in advance, which can be done over the phone. The parent then must give permission in writing that they agree with the change and does not want an ARD meeting to discuss the issue.

Another new form you may have already seen is the **MEMBER EXCUSED AGREEMENT** form. This form is to be used when a Brief ARD does have to be called, but it is not necessary for everyone to be in attendance at the table. For example, the Resource Teacher has requested the Brief ARD to adjust the amount of time your child will be coming to the resource room. You have already discussed it and are in agreement. There does not appear to be a need to have the Occupational Therapist at the meeting, for the decision to adjust resource is not related to the O.T. goals and objectives. In this case, the O.T. can be "excused." As with the other form, the parent will be notified in advance and has an opportunity to give permission, in writing, for this action to occur.

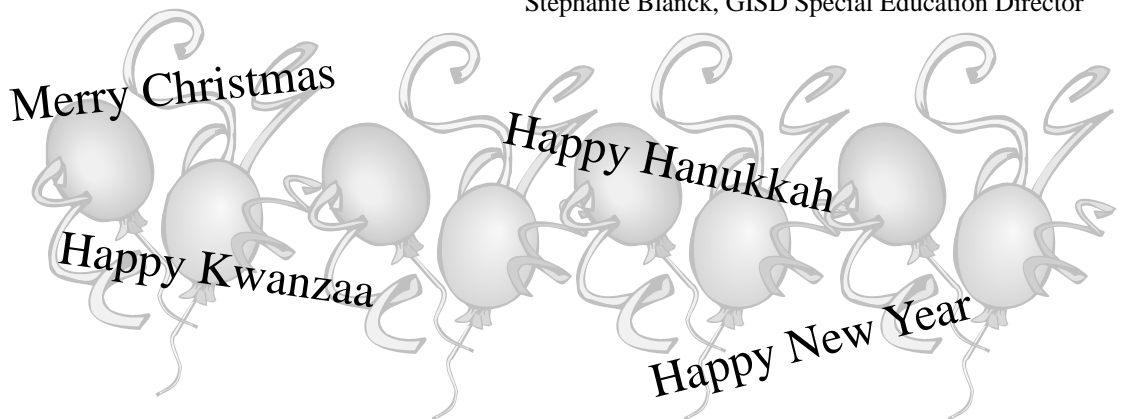


The federal government, as well as ourselves, would like to think that these changes will not only reduce unnecessary paperwork, but also allow for more meaningful communications between the school and the families. If you have any questions about the above-mentioned forms, please feel free to call your child's case manager or the Special Education Coordinator for the campus.

Stephanie Blanck, GISD Special Education Director

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SECAC Mission Statement

Our mission is to strive to promote excellence in special education through collaboration and outreach with united voices of family, staff and community.

Parent to Parent

The Case of the Case Manager - As promised in the last newsletter, we're going to talk about Special Ed Case Managers. In my opinion, your student's Case Manager is the lifeline for your student, you, the campus staff and administration. Wow! Sounds like a lot to expect of a person and it is, but it is that important. Let me explain.

As parents, we all assume that everyone who comes in contact with our student knows everything about him/her and their specific needs. When our students are very young, this is usually the case. But, the more people who join your student's team, the more likely someone will know your student at a very high level. Think about it for a minute, can a Principal truly know every need of 800+ students? Can a Regular Ed teacher know about every disability that exists, from autism to blindness to ADHD? Can a Speech Therapist who might have a caseload of 80+ students know every student intimately as she is driving from campus to campus daily? When your student has a change in medication or is starting to get ill or a family crisis has occurred that might upset your student's behavior, do you know who to call or does it feel like there are about 10 people who need to have this information? This is where a Case Manager can become the lifeline for your student. By becoming intimately familiar with 10 - 15 students and all their special needs, the Case Manager becomes the point of contact (or POC for those of you in the corporate world) for you, your student, the administrators and the teachers. It is very frustrating to have something that you need to share with your student's school and so you call one phone number after another only to reach many different voice mail systems. Then, you wonder, who else should I call? Or, a regular ed teacher has a question about your student's Behavior Plan, but isn't sure who to contact? If your student is just starting elementary school, you may not see the necessity in this. But, believe me, by the time your student reaches middle school, you will completely understand. You sometimes feel like you are going crazy because you can't seem to contact anyone, everyone has a different answer and no, they did not know that your student is taking new medications and this is why his/her behavior has been so erratic. It is very easy for miscommunications to occur and for events to escalate when all that was needed was a POC.

Does a Case Manager resolve all issues having to do with Special Education? Of course not. No one person or event ever resolves all issues that you will encounter. But, having had the experience of working with a really great Case Manager, I can tell you that it sure does take away a lot of the frustration, anxiety and anger that many parents (and staff!) experience when no one person is there to champion your student.

Get to know your student's Case Manager. Don't wait for them to call you. Send them an e-mail and ask how things are going. Place a quick call and update them on anything that's happening in your student's life that has you concerned. And don't forget that magic word, CONFERENCE. Every time something happens, it is not necessary to go through the legal meeting otherwise known as an ARD. You can call your Case Manager, describe your concern and ask that a conference be set up with the proper personnel. If you just need to discuss an assignment with your student's teacher, then by all means call the teacher directly. But, if the issue could be something bigger or more widespread that might effect several people, ask for a conference. And never forget that other magic word, TEAM. The team starts forming at the very first meeting you have with your student's school district. The team members will change as time goes on, but there will always be a team working with your student. That is one of the most beautiful aspects of Special Education and something we as parents sometimes forget or abuse. Be kind to your student's team and be a team player yourself. It really does make a difference.

Before I close, let me ask you one final question.

DO YOU KNOW YOUR CASE MANAGER'S NAME AND HOW TO CONTACT THEM? If not, contact your campus' Special Ed Coordinator immediately:

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

Have a great holiday season and I'll talk to you in the Spring.

Dawn



Dawn Jennings
GISD Special Education Parent Liaison
jenningsd@georgetown.txed.net
943-5080 x4805

Meet the GISD Special Education Staff - Central Office

When you move to Georgetown or you start having questions about your child's special needs, one of the first places you contact is the Special Education Dept at Central Office. Chances are that you will talk to office administrators Joy Bohanan or Anne Weaver and then an appointment will be set up with either Director, Stephanie Blanck or Assistant Director, Regina Gilchriest. These four ladies are the eyes, ears and voice for our Special Education program in GISD. Here's your chance to put faces to names and learn a little about them!



From left to right: Joy Bohanan, Regina Gilchriest, Stephanie Blanck, Anne Weaver

My name is Stephanie Blanck and I am the GISD Special Education Director.

I was born in Long Island, New York. We also lived all over the world including Iraq, England and Mexico. (I attended elementary school in Mexico and as a result am very sensitive to the needs of second language learners.) I attended UT Austin for my Bachelor's degree in Psychology, Southwest TX for my Masters in Education – School Psychology and also Southwest TX for Mid-Management Certification. I have been a Licensed School Psychologist working in the schools since 1979 and have seen all the changes to the original special education law.

I worked for the Bell County Cooperative for Exceptional Children for 7 years, then came to GISD in 1986. I was an LSSP for 3 of the 6 schools which were in GISD at the time. (I also coached the Lady Eagles Soccer Team during some of that time.) Prior to being asked to take over Special Education in 1994, I was Assistant Principal of Annie Purl Elementary .

I am on the Board of the Williamson Co. Children's Support Coalition, Co- Chair of the Williamson Co. Community Resources Coordinating Group (CRCG), belong to Leadership Georgetown (through the Chamber of Commerce) and am a volunteer for Victim Services of Georgetown Police Dept. I am also an active member with other civic groups within the community.

I have seen a great deal of change in Georgetown the community, as well as, Georgetown the school district. My husband Michael and I have been married for 26 years. He works for the United States Postal Service. We have two children who went through GISD – Devon graduated in 1998 and is married to a teacher at GHS and Keegan, who graduated in 2004, is a sophomore in college majoring in Aviation.

My name is Ann Weaver and I am one of the Special Education Secretaries at Central Office. I've been with the Special Education Department for almost 2 years. I was brand new to the school district and not having ever dealt with a district before, I was really surprised to see what all is involved and have learned a great deal about Special Education and the school district. I really enjoy working for the school district, my Directors, co-workers and all the fantastic Special Education Staff.



My name is Joy Bohanan. I have worked for Georgetown ISD, Special Education for 24 years. I have seen many changes in my time here and have enjoyed working with the many wonderful teacher and staff. I have found that they are a very caring group of people and that is one of the reasons they are "special".

My name is Regina Gilchriest. I am in my fourth year as Assistant Special Education Director and twelfth working in GISD. I earned both my Bachelor's and Master's degrees at Lamar University in Beaumont and worked in the Southeast Texas area for my first eleven years in education. I started my career as a resource/self-contained classroom teacher at a very small school and worked with students 7th-12th grade. I also taught one year as a first grade resource teacher. The rest of my classroom experience was as a general education language arts teacher at the middle school level. I then earned my Master's and obtained my Diagnostician certification and spent the next eleven years at the middle and high school levels working in that capacity. I have truly loved all of my years working in the schools and feel especially blessed to be here in Georgetown. The excellent quality of our teachers and administrators and their high expectations for all students, along with the best bunch of kids in Texas continues to move me daily to assist our Special Education Department in finding and implementing innovative ways to improve students' education.

On a personal note, my husband Tom and I have just sent off our only child, Anna, to the University of Oklahoma. In our home we have our 2 dogs to keep us company, and we spend a lot of our free time gardening. Tom is retired, and we love Georgetown so much that I hope to retire within the next ten years and remain right here in town.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2006

ACADEMIC INFORMATION –

- Breakout A: Graduation Plans – College Credits at GHS, Career Interests – Karen French (GHS Counselor)
- Breakout B: Pre-AP, AP & GT - Jean Martin

SUPPORT SERVICES –

- Breakout C: “What if my child struggles, but is not 504/Special Ed?” - Ginna Beal, SAIL Coordinator
- Breakout D: Discussing your child’s special needs with your child and others – Ken Thoreson (LSSP)
- Breakout E: “What is 504?” – Stephanie Blanck (GISD Special Ed Director)
- Breakout F: “How to Hug a Porcupine” - Dealing with Conflict with Teens - Tommy West (Georgetown Project)
- Breakout G: “Teaching Tolerance”– Irene Morales, Diversity Consultant, (Georgetown Prevention Partnership)
- Breakout H: “Road Rules – What Every Parent Should Know”- issues concerning teen driving –Texas PTA
- Breakout I: Resolving Conflict -"Power Struggles Unmasked" - The Georgetown Project

NETWORKING AND STUDENT EVENTS –

- Breakout J: Sibs Network – Christie Wilke (LSSP)
- Breakout K: Autism Spectrum Parent Networking - Annette McCarty (GISD Behavior Specialist)

THURSDAY, MARCH 23, 2006

SUPPORT SERVICES –

- Breakout A: “My Special Ed student is transitioning from ? grade to ? grade. HELP!!!” – Panel of Special Ed Parents and GISD Personnel
- Breakout B: “How to Hug a Porcupine” - Dealing with Teens' Friends & Peers – Tommy West (Georgetown Project)
- Breakout C: Alcohol Prevention – Betty Sandefur, Williamson County Coalition on Underage Drinking (Georgetown Prevention Partnership)
- Breakout D: Parental Controls on Your PC (how to check the sites your kids visit & other tidbits) - Richard Owen
- Breakout E: Decision Making -"First Things First" – The Georgetown Project

NETWORKING AND STUDENT EVENTS –

- Breakout F: Sibs Network – Christie Wilke (LSSP)
- Breakout G: Autism Spectrum Parent Networking - Annette McCarty (GISD Behavior Specialist)

THURSDAY, APRIL 27, 2006

ACADEMIC INFORMATION –

- Breakout A: Interviewing Skills for students preparing for summer jobs or scholarship committees – Linda Hughes (GHS Counselor)

SUPPORT SERVICES -

- Breakout B: Social Skills and Social Stories – Patricia Jackson, GISD Behavior Specialist
- Breakout C: Medication Update
- Breakout D: “How to Hug a Porcupine” - Discipline for Teens – Tommy West (Georgetown Project)
- Breakout E: “Can We Talk About Puberty and Sexuality?” – interactive workshop – Texas PTA
- Breakout F: Family Dynamics 101 – The Georgetown Project

NETWORKING AND STUDENT EVENTS –

- Breakout G: Sibs Network – Christie Wilke (LSSP)
- Breakout H: Autism Spectrum Parent Networking - Annette McCarty (GISD Behavior Specialist)



REMEMBER: FREE PARENT EDUCATION, FREE PIZZA & DRINKS, FREE CHILDCARE!
*Ninth Grade Campus, 2295 N. Austin Ave (just north of GHS), Pizza at 6:15 pm,
Sessions start at 6:45 pm*

SECAC News - Parent Networking

Welcome to the Breakfast Club....

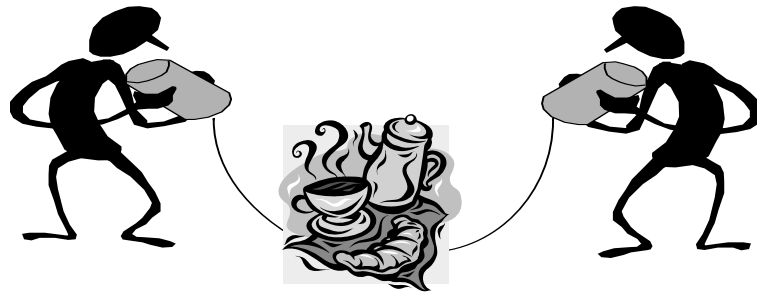
Have you ever found yourself sitting in an ARD meeting absently rubbing that little spot on your chest, just left of center, as if to rub away the dull, familiar pain in your heart? If you have, then congratulations. You're a member of an elite club you never wanted to be a member of. You're the parent of a special needs child.

I remember when my son, Steven, was diagnosed with autism. My husband and I felt SO ALONE. No one we knew seemed to understand what we were going through. How could they if they'd never walked in our shoes? Don't get me wrong, everyone – friends and family alike – tried to be helpful and supportive. But while my nieces were taking ballet lessons, Steven was receiving OT sessions. While our friends bragged on their children making the honor roll and soccer teams, we were struggling over IEP goals.

Of course, everyone's situation is different. Every child's needs are different. I guess the point I'm trying to make is that only another parent of a special needs child can truly understand what it feels like to *be* the parent of a special needs child.

And that's why I'm passionate about bringing parents together to share their experiences, their knowledge and, yes, occasionally their pain. SECAC will be hosting parent get-togethers at your child's campus. First thing in the morning, bi-lingual, before work, childcare available. Parents meeting parents, sharing resources, setting up playdates for their special needs children. Look for the notices in your child's backpack. For more information, call Dawn Jennings at 943-5080 x4805, or Kristin Gonzalez at 868-0216.

Welcome to the Breakfast Club.



Something to Think About - Are Labels Helpful or Harmful?

An article by Pricilla Vail, M.A.T.

Let me tell you about my boatshed and me.

At summer's end, our family puts the canoe, the paddles, lifejackets, Frisbees and fishing gear, along with any unused canned goods, in the boatshed. One year, by mistake, we left the cans on the floor where they sloshed around in surging winter storm water.

In June, the cans were there, intact, but their labels had soaked off. Although I could identify the can of soup, I had no idea whether it was shrimp bisque, chicken with stars, split pea or jellied consommé. Was this can baked beans, artichoke hearts, or stewed tomatoes? Which was for kids, which would be delicious with a dollop of yogurt and a sprinkle of curry? Which needed to be piping hot, which chilled?

For the food offered to match the appetite of the recipient, we needed to know what was what and who was ready for lunch.

The same is true for children and schooling. If Martha or Sam has trouble learning letter sounds, we need to prepare multi-sensory training. If Joe and Dawn have trouble with reading comprehension because they have weak receptive language, let's say so and target some specific help.

Labels are dangerous when they replace a person's humanity and individuality, but they are invaluable when they provide the precise terminology to decide who needs what, when, where, why and how. After all, what's to be gained by giving watery broth to a student ready for hearty stew, or clam chowder to someone allergic to fish?

Our Community Partners – Bluebonnet MHMR

Bluebonnet Trails Community MHMR Center Wants To Help YOU!



If you live in Williamson County and your child has Mental Retardation, a Pervasive Developmental Disorder or an Autistic Spectrum Disorder (including Asperger's Syndrome), they qualify for our services.

Services available while children are still in school (in addition to what the school program is required to offer) include:

- Placement on the HCS Interest waiting list
- In-Home/Community Training
- Service Coordination
- Counseling & Therapy (Behavioral, OT/PT/Speech)
- Respite (including summer camp)
- ARD Support & Advocacy
- Adaptive Equipment

Additional services available after an adult child graduates from school include:

- Employment Assistance/Job Training
- Day Habilitation
- Independent Living & Housing Assistance
- Night School

If you would like to start the intake process or want more information, please call **Melissa Nylander, Outreach Coordinator**, at **512-244-8425** or e-mail at melissa.nylander@bluebonnetmhm.org.

Book Review – “Reflections from a Different Journey”



“Reflections from a Different Journey—What Adults with Disabilities Wish All Parents Knew”,
By Stanley D. Klein & John D. Kemp

I just finished a great book of articles written by adults with disabilities for parents of children with disabilities. I was nervous about starting it because I was not sure that I would like what I was about to read, but I was greatly surprised to find that the articles mimicked a lot of what we tell parents through Texas Parent to Parent:

- *Acknowledge and accept your feelings of grief and loss,
- *Acknowledge that what breaks your heart may not break your child's,
- *Acknowledge your child's strengths and abilities and accept their limitations only when they prove they have any,
- *Integrate your child into their community as full as possible,
- *Learn about your child's rights and learn to advocate for your child,
- *Talk to your children about their feelings, needs, and desires,
- *Acknowledge that your child is an individual and has their own life to lead—help them prepare for that life,
- *Connect with other parents for support and fun,
- *And, find something to do for yourself—just for you— and do it on a regular basis.

I highly recommend that all parents read this book—these writers say in many different ways how to help your child and your whole family. I found that several of the writers spoke directly to me and I think you will too!

Reviewed by: Laura J. Warren, Texas Parent to Parent

If you have read a good book that you would like to share with other Special Ed Parents, consider writing a review of it for this newsletter. Send your review to jenningsd@georgetown.txed.net

Our Student Stars - Special Olympics



★ Fall Classic held in Waco, Oct. 20th-22nd. Three of our athletes received medals and one received a 4th place ribbon!

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

The bowling group pictures were taken at a Saturday practice. We have 4 student volunteers from the High School that have helped this year and the kids just love them as you can see.

★ We just competed at the Area 13 Meet in Austin this past Nov. 17th and 18th. Nine athletes competed: Steven Frost, Wynter Stearns, Samuel Knauth, Sarah Brooks, Michael Weaver, Bram Neil, Danielle Wheatley, Whitney Lee, and Daniel Hahn.

Breaking News!!!

* Linda Meigs (former GISD SAIL Coordinator), who is now the President of the Texas Assoc. of Student Assistance Professionals, and Stephanie Blanck (GISD Special Education Director) have been invited to present at the Mid-Winter Conference, Texas Council for Administrators in Special Education. They will present, **“Beefing up your Pre-Referral Process to Promote Compliance with IDEA 2004”**. The Conference is January 24-26, 2006 in Austin.

* Stephanie has also been asked to be on the Texas Task Force to help "define" Response to Intervention. She will be part of a small group meeting with TEA over the next 3-5 months.....this is a great opportunity for GISD!

We just competed at the Area 13 Meet in Austin this past November 17th and 18th. Nine athletes competed:

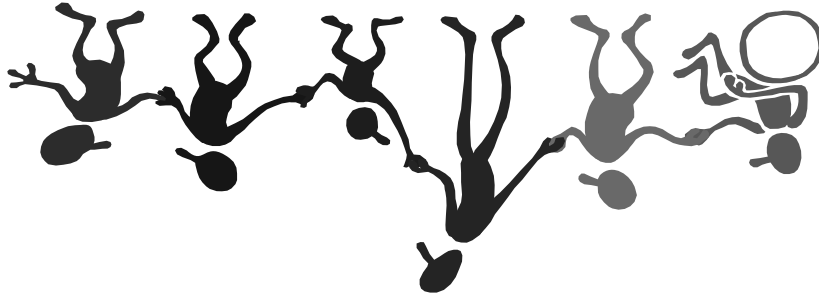
December 10th we have one athlete, who will be competing at the Area 13 Power lifting Competition in Round Rock. This is a new sport for our Georgetown Special Eagles, so next year we plan on increasing the numbers by starting earlier with training and motivation!!

For more information on Special Olympics, call Tina Lawhon at 943-2000 x4718.

Way to go Linda and Stephanie!



Way to go Georgetown Special Eagles!



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

Special Education Community
Advisory Council (SECAC)



Special Education 101



GISD Special Education Director, Stephanie Blanck, will be presenting 4 weekly sessions entitled "Special Education 101" in Spring 2006. This is an excellent opportunity for anyone who has questions or concerns about how Special Education works to get answers from the top person in our district. (Even if your student has received Special Education services for awhile, you will be surprised how much you don't know!) If you are interested in attending these sessions, please call Joy Bohanan at 943-5008 to reserve a spot. These sessions are free of cost and childcare will be provided.

GISD ON THE WEB—
<http://www.georgetown.txed.net/>