



SPECIAL EDITION

Happy New Year from SECAC!

Message from SECAC's Chair, Gerard Jimenez

I hope you've had a good start to the New Year! As we enter the second half of the school year I'd like to share with you that the Special Education Community Advisory Committee (SECAC) is busy working on some very exciting projects that we believe you will find useful and informative. SECAC is working on a parent survey, creating a parent handbook, a SECAC parent rep program and a special education orientation program. The parent handbook will be a resource book designed to give parents all the information they need to understand the ARD process and the resources available in AISD and in the community. We plan on completing it before the school year is over and hope to have it ready for distribution in the beginning of the next school year. The SECAC parent rep program is designed to have a volunteer parent rep on campus who will serve as a coordinator of periodic informational events of interest to parents of children with disabilities and to support parents with special education related issues. We are planning on launching a pilot program next year at about a dozen schools. We will be asking schools and special education coordinators for parent referrals. Parent reps will attend a training program before they begin their work on campuses. The special education orientation program will be designed to give parents

the information they need before their child attends one of the elementary, middle and high schools. Among other things, they will get an introduction to the alphabet soup of acronyms and learn about the ARD process; learn about the special considerations in elementary, middle and high school; and have an opportunity to ask questions. The parent survey will be mailed soon and will also be available online in the AISD web site in the special education section. Please make time to fill this out. We will be sharing the data we collect with AISD administration so we can better understand the needs of students and concerns of parents in the district.

We are still looking for new SECAC members to fill our committee. We have meetings and work sessions once a month. The commitment is small compared to the unique experience and information about the school district you will gain. If you would like more information about SECAC please contact me at your convenience.

I hope you have a terrific year!

Gerard Jimenez
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The time commitment of joining SECAC is small compared to the unique experience and information about the school district you will gain.

—Gerard Jimenez, Chair, SECAC

SECAC

Spring 2009

SECAC Members

Gerard Jimenez, Chair
Eileen Butler, Vice-Chair
Lori Tulllos Barta, Secretary
Beth Meyer, Newsletter
Susan Armstrong
Kathleen Reish
Connie Sadowski
Regina Staffa
Cynthia Valadez



Important News!

SECAC will be sending a survey soon to all parents of students receiving special education services. We want to know about yours and your child's experiences with inclusion, IEP goals, communication between school and home, transition services, and other areas. Please complete it—we want your input!



For your information...

Who Do You Call - The Role of The Special Education Coordinator

During the time our children are receiving special education services, many issues can arise. For example, a child's needs can change or there can be a disagreement with school staff about the services that are being provided. If these issues cannot be resolved with your child's case manager (folder teacher) or the campus administrator, you or the campus administrator can choose to go to the Special Education Department. Every campus is assigned a **Special Education Coordinator**. The coordinators have many roles. For us parents, one of their most important duties is that they are our guide to the wider world of the Special Education department beyond our child's campus. They help coordinate any resources that the campuses need to support our students. What does this mean to us? If the campus needs more staff, training, or additional services to meet our children's

needs, the coordinator is the one who attends the ARD and helps find a solution. They also work with campuses to ensure that they are following all parts of the IEP. The bottom line: the coordinator is a very important link between your child and the services that he or she needs to succeed. They are the members of the Special Education Department who have the greatest knowledge of your child's needs, your child's campus, and how you can access the educational services your child needs to succeed in school. Find out who your coordinator is through your child's case manager (folder teacher).

If for some reason you are not satisfied with the solutions offered by the coordinator, your next contact for elementary campuses is Roberto Pacini, Assistant Director, Special Education, and for secondary campuses is Ann Jenkins, Assistant Director, Special Education. They report directly to Janna Lilly, the Director of Special Education.



Report from SECAC Subcommittee on Autism Spectrum Disorders

Are you aware that AISD has specialized staff to support students on the autism spectrum? It's called SCORES and the SECAC subcommittee on autism spectrum disorders (ASD) has found that many parents are unaware that it exists. SCORES stands for Social Communication Resources and Services. SCORES staff support students with autism spectrum disorders and/or other disabilities who demonstrate deficits in social, communicative, and behavioral functioning. Some schools have SCORES staff on their campuses full time and some campuses are assigned traveling SCORES staff to support them.

Our subcommittee is working on ways to make more parents aware that the SCORES program exists. We worked with SCORES staff to have a presentation at the Rosedale School on October 14th. Don't worry if you missed that one because there will be another one on March 10th. The link to the SCORES website is <http://www.austinschools.org/scores/>. Feel welcome to contact Peggy Garen, Special Education Coordinator for Autism at 414-3192 or Sandra Mendez at 414-0163.

Our subcommittee is also working to pilot a SECAC parent network in which parents can get guidance to resources and district programs. We visited Round Rock's parent representative program on January 13th. We also met Ann Jacobson,

Region XIII Education Specialist, to learn what is happening in the autism field on the regional and state level.

Our subcommittee meets the second Tuesday and sometimes the fourth Tuesday of every month. Currently our meetings are in the morning. If you share our passion for helping to improve the services for students on the autism spectrum and related disorders, please join us. We are currently looking for new members. Please contact Kathleen Reish, subcommittee chair, at 241-0592.

[Editor's Note: The SCORES program description from the SCORES website says:

"The amount and type of [SCORES] support is defined by the needs of the individual students. Students with ASD often need support in eight key deficit areas:

- Attention
- Communication
- Sensory and motor processing
- Play and leisure
- Life skills
- Cognitive/academic
- Social cognition, and
- Emotional regulation"

SCORES staff support students in all of these areas as dictated by the needs of the student.]

Letter from Janna Lilly, Director of AISD's Special Education Department



Janna Lilly, Director of Special Education

Hello, Parents! Happy New Year! I hope you and your family enjoyed a safe, restful and fun filled holiday season.

As you remember from the fall newsletter:

The vision of the Special Education Department is for the Austin Independent School District to provide EVERY student with an excellent education such that students are successful, parents are partners, and educators are empowered.

I wanted to give you an update on some of the 'parents as partners' activities I told you about in the fall newsletter.

1) We are establishing a parent email group as an additional way to get information out on district wide special education events. So far we have email addresses for approximately 30% of our families. **If you have an email address and would like to be on our email group, please share that email address with your child's special education teacher so we can include you in the group.** We have set it up to ensure your confidentiality. You will not be able to see any other email addresses but your own. We will continue to communicate by paper as we have always done but we will be adding email as an additional communication tool. We hope to get the first group email out to you soon.

2) This past fall we added 4 additional training opportunities for parents in what we called "Co-op Around Austin". The pur-

pose was to take the trainings closer to your neighborhoods to make them more accessible for you. We had training opportunities at Fulmore Middle School (Central Austin), Clifton Career Development Center (North Austin), River City Youth Foundation (East Austin) and Clayton Elementary (Southwest Austin). All of these were in addition to our traditional Rosedale parent nights. In total over 300 parents took advantage of all Co-op training opportunities this fall. We expect to do more of the same this spring. Please watch for our Spring Co-op flyer outlining upcoming parent training opportunities.

We are excited about continued opportunities to partner with you to ensure a quality education for your child. If you ever have questions or concerns, we want to know about it. Contact your teacher, campus principal or special education coordinator. If you need assistance in contacting them, contact our main office at 512-414-1731 and we will be happy to help you.

You can find more information on special education on our website www.austinisd.org.

Getting Ready for the Future

For Families of Children with Special Needs

From an article by Rosemary Alexander, AISD Parent/School Support Team, 414-2049



Your child is never too young to begin planning and thinking about his or her future. Here are some steps that parents can take to prepare for themselves and their children for the coming challenges.

1. **Prepare to be the advocate for your child for the long haul.** This includes creating and using a good record keeping system, learning about special education law, developing negotiation and communication skills, learning about community resources, and learning about your child's disability.
2. **Prepare to be your child's care-provider for the long haul.** Adopt healthy habits for yourself, build a support network, build opportunities in your life to have fun, and learn relaxation techniques.
3. **Develop a long-range vision for your child and your family.** Start to imagine your child's future and think about what it will take to make that future possible. Then plan how you will provide opportunities for your child to learn those skills. You are the keeper of your child's vision, hopes, and expectations. Remind people of your long-term goals. You and your family are in your child's life for the long-term while the professionals come and go.
4. **Prepare for change and transitions.** Know that you will need to do extra planning at transition points, like ECI to PPCD, PPCD to elementary, elementary to middle school, and so on. Find out all you can about the next step by going to the new school, meeting new teachers and staff, taking your child to the new school. Build in ways to com-

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More News for You

(Getting Ready for the Future, continued from page 3)

municate at the new place, especially in the beginning and find out who you should talk to when any problems arise. Remember that transitions can be hard for you, too! Get ready emotionally by finding someone to talk to and support you.

5. **Whatever your child's future, you will need extra money! Face it now and plan for it.** If you are not already on these waiting lists, call **TODAY**. There are some programs with income requirements and there are some that are called Medicaid Waiver Programs, which are based on the child's income. These waiver programs have waiting lists that are many years long. Call 1-877-438-5658 to get on the CLASS and MDCP waiting lists. It only takes a phone call and that call can help ensure your child has the services he or she needs as an adult.

There are numerous other programs. Call Rosemary Alexander at 414-2049 to learn more or go to www.austinsisd.org/familysupport under Medicaid Waiver Programs. Finally, be sure that your will places your assets into a special needs trust so that your child is eligible for public benefits. Work with an attorney who is knowledgeable about estate planning for families of children with disabilities.

[Editor's Note: Do not let denial of the fact that your child may be unable to live independently as an adult delay signing your child onto these lists. You will not be asked to prove eligibility for services until your child reaches the top of the waiting lists. At that point, your child may not need the services, but if he or she does, you will be glad that you placed him or her on the lists at a very young age. All it takes is a phone call!]

Your child is never too young to begin planning and thinking about his or her future...

Rosemary Alexander, AISD Parent Support Specialist

Power of Parents: Mills Elementary "Roaring Readers" Early Reading Intervention Program

Reading is a team sport at Mills Elementary as a group of 85 volunteers work with over 100 students in grades K-2 on practicing reading skills. This program was created to fill a gap in the current funding of reading support for general education students below third grade who do not qualify for special education services. This is the fourth year of our program and I am proud to say we are able to support 95% of teacher requests for student support despite a decline in volunteers this year largely due to the economic down turn.

Who are our volunteers? We have parents, grandparents, community volunteers, business leaders, former teachers, firefighters and 5th grade student mentors who believe every child can be a great reader given the support of a caring volunteer.

Eighty-five percent of our volunteers do not have students in the program, but volunteer 30 minutes once a week to provide the encouragement needed to help our youngest readers believe they can be a great reader and practice reading skills

in a positive way. Training is provided in a variety of multi-sensory, structured and systematic programs designed to provide the intervention needed to provide support to our classroom teachers and students with a team goal of 100% of our students on grade level.

Last year, 100% of our former Roaring Readers in 3rd grade passed the TAKS exam on the first try with 35% scoring at the commended level. Only 20% of these students were provided reading intervention in 3rd grade by the campus reading specialist.

The positive power parents can have on students is evident every day in the smile of our Roaring Readers who are enthusiastic participants and are proud to be a Roaring Reader at Mills Elementary!

More information about our early reading intervention

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Helpful Programs

Spring 2009 Family Support Cooperative Packed with Information!

The Family Support Cooperative is a partnership of AISD, Austin Travis County MHMR, and the Arc of the Capital Area. The Co-op has meetings to inform and support families with children of all ages and all disabilities and the people in their lives. There will be meetings on the 2nd Tuesday of the months of February through May at Rose-dale school, 2117 West 49th St. Free child care and pizza start at 6:30 and meetings are from 7:00-8:30. Most of all, each evening has 8-10 topics that you may choose from. Topics include:

- Sibling support group,
- ADHD/ADD,
- Autism spectrum disorders,
- Finding and funding respite care,
- Behavior/Emotional issues,

- Social opportunities for ages 16 and up,
- Transitions, and many more .

Also, on the third Tuesday of each month from February through April is the Co-op Around Austin. Note that these meetings start at 6:30 instead of 7:00 with childcare and pizza starting at 6:00. These meetings will be at Fulmore Middle School on February 17, Pleasant Hill Elementary on March 24, and April 21 at Woolridge Elementary.

Finally, a series of Parent-Teen Workshops will be held at Akins High School the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month through May 6. For more information about all of these programs, see the flyer brought home by your child in January, call Rosemary at 414-2049 or Grace (Spanish speakers) at 414-0955. You may also go to www.austinisd.org/familysupport.



Texas Parent to Parent Provides Information and Support to Our Families

Texas Parent to Parent is a nonprofit organization created by parents to provide information and support for families of children with disabilities, chronic illnesses, and other special needs throughout the state of Texas. Some of their many services include:

- An online resource directory,
- One-on-one peer support for parents and other caregivers,
- Answers to specific questions on topics like special education, insurance issues, or sibling issues via email or phone,
- Training for parent support volunteers,
- Quarterly newsletters, and much more.

In June of each year, Texas Parent to Parent hosts an incredibly powerful and informative conference. The theme of this year's conference is Many Hearts, Shared Dreams, One Voice and it will be June 26-27 here in Austin. Check out www.txp2p.org for more on this wonderful group!



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programs and the parent support group at Mills, Parents of Different Learners, is available at www.millspta.org.

[Editor's Note: The author of this article, Regina Staffa, is a new member of SECAC. She is the proud mother of three children with dyslexia, two of whom receive special education services. In addition to coordinating the Roaring Reading Teams, she is in her second year in training to be a Certified Academic Language Therapist through the Scottish Rite Learning Center of Austin. She is currently working with 21 students with dyslexia using the Take Flight Program as a volunteer at Mills. She helped co-found a parent support group with a special education teacher, a general education teacher, and an administrator at Mills which meets monthly to support parents whose children are non-traditional learners. She is an enthusiastic and knowledgeable addition to our SECAC team and we are happy to have her!]

Resources for Our Families



Family Support Cooperative-Your child will bring home a flyer about these meetings, happening on the second Tuesday of each month at Rosedale, 2117 W. 49th St. and the third Tuesdays, in locations around Austin. Free pizza, childcare and Spanish interpretation are provided. For more information, call 414-2049, or go to www.austinisd.org/familysupport.

Advocacy, Inc.-The organization's mission is to advocate for, protect and advance the legal, human and service rights of people with disabilities. Call 454-4816 or www.advocacyinc.org.

The Arc of the Capital Area-Respite, parent-to-parent matches, case management. Call 476-7044 or www.thearcofthecapitalarea.org.

Child and Adolescent Bipolar Foundation-Information and support for families of children with bipolar disorder. www.bpkids.org

CHADD-Support and information for families of children with ADHD. Meetings at Rosedale each month. www.chadd.org

Children's Partnership-Meets the complex needs of youth with serious emotional disturbances in Travis County. Call 854-4596 or www.childrenspartnership.com

DSACT-Provides support and resources to families of individuals with Down syndrome. Call 323-0808 or www.dsact.com.

Easter Seals-Provides services so people with disabilities

and their families can fully participate in their communities. Go to www.centraltxeasterseals.com,

Latina Mami-A local support network for Latina mothers and their families. Call 689-2340 or info@latinamami.org.

LD Online-Informative website on learning disabilities and ADHD at www.ldonline.org.

SafePlace-A local advocacy, prevention, and education group for victims of sexual and domestic violence, including families of children with disabilities. Call 267-7233 or www.safeplace.org.

www.specialneedsneighborhood.com-Web site for families of children with special needs to communicate with one another about Austin-area resources.

Spectrum Social and Recreation Resources-Offers social and recreation skills instruction to clients with ASDs, ADHD, non-verbal learning disorders, and related social-cognitive disorders. Call 524-5482 or www.spectrumsocial.net.

Texas Autism Advocacy-Information, resources and education for families of children with ASDs at www.texasautismadvocacy.org.

Texas Parent to Parent-Provides support and information for families of children with disabilities, chronic illnesses and other special needs. Call 458-8600 or www.txp2p.org.

Wrightslaw-Special education law and advocacy web site at www.wrightslaw.com.

What is SECAC?

The AISD Special Education Community Advisory Committee has been in existence over 20 years. It is composed primarily of parents of students who receive special education services and others who advocate for those students. We advise and support the School Board and AISD administration through our knowledge and understanding of students with special needs. Our mission is to partner with AISD special education staff to ensure the progress and inclusion of students in AISD special education. If you are interested in joining our committee or any of our subcommittees, please email Gerard Jimenez, SECAC chair, at Gerard@austin.rr.com.



SECAC will be sending out a survey soon to all parents of students receiving special education services. See the note on page 1 for a partial list of topics.

Please complete this survey—your input is very important!



Do you know of other great programs or resources for our families?

Send an email to Gerard Jimenez, SECAC Chair, at gerard@austin.rr.com and we can include the link in next fall's SPECIAL EDITION newsletter.

