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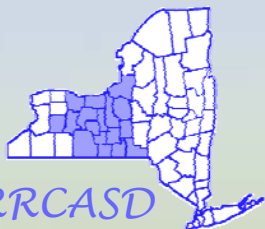
ASK THE EXPERT

A school administrator question answered by Caroline I. Magyar, Ph.D.

To receive a copy of our Newsletter or to join our listserv, please visit our website at:

www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/autism

or call us from inside of the '585' area code at 273-1613; from outside of the '585' area code, call toll-free: 1-888-806-9526



DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

CAROLINE I. MAGYAR, PH.D., Associate Professor of Pediatrics, University of Rochester

April is Autism Awareness Month, so it is fitting that with this edition of our newsletter I can inform you of the RRCASD's year 1 progress and highlight some of the innovative and novel programs that are provided within our region. In addition, several sections of this newsletter convey a theme of family-school-community collaboration, a theme fitting for April's Autism Awareness month.

We are now well into our 2nd year of this NYS Education Department funded project and I have some good news and some bad news. First, the good news. We have expanded our region to include 6 counties located in the Central and Southern Tier regions of the state. This brings our total service region to 17-counties. We have been busy getting the word out about the RRCASD to this sub-region, and we are providing a variety of Short Talks and Outreach activities. Through these activities we are beginning to learn about the unique needs in these counties and hope to work with a variety of community

partners to bring more resources to this area. The other good news is that we are hosting our first annual Spring Conference Series. This conference series covers a variety of topics including:

- Updates in evidence-based practices in autism spectrum disorders
- Communication & Behavioral regulation
- Family-School-Community Collaboration

For additional information about our community education activities, please visit our website: www.urmc.rochester.edu/childrens-hospital/autism or call our toll-free number listed below.

Now, the bad news: **we are at risk of losing our funding due to NYS budget cuts.** If funding for our Center is not continued, the RRCASD will no longer exist and we will no longer be able to provide community education and technical assistance to our community. At the time of this writing the budget is going in for a vote. To voice your support of the RRCASD, please contact your local legislative representative and request that the RRCASD be considered for continued funding. Thank you in advance for your support.

RRCASD ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES: UPDATES

The RRCASD is pleased to present HIGHLIGHTS of some our progress since the start of our funding in 2007/2008:

- We have had more than 5,000 visits to our website.
- We have provided 27 Short Talks and trained over 565 individuals. We have provided talks on 13 different topics ranging from a description of the RRCASD to College Supports for Individuals with ASD.
- We have disseminated approximately 3,200 Brochures & approximately 900 Information Sheets.
- We have disseminated approximately 1,500 Newsletters & about 1,000 Information Posters.
- Our 1st in a series of self-guided training CDs, *Daily Visual Schedule*, has completed its piloting. It is currently being prepared for release in late April 2009 and will be available on our website for a free download.
- We have provided Information & Referral to over 325 people.
- Our resource database continues to grow, with approximately 350 specific resources listed covering our 17-county region.

2008/2009 is proving to be just as busy as 2007/2008. So, watch for our Fall 2009 Newsletter for an update on new resources and progress.



FEATURES: FOR YOUR INFORMATION...

For this edition we decided to focus on highlighting a sample of **Programs within the Region:**

Early Childhood Education Center in Syracuse: The Elmcrest Early Education Center offers several children's programs including a special education preschool program serving children ages 3-5 years (*SPICE Program*), a daycare program that serves children 6 weeks – 5 years (*Small Wonders*), and a Syracuse City Universal Pre-Kindergarten collaboration. The **SPICE** program offers six inclusive preschool classrooms that are intensively staffed, which provides individualized child programming along a continuum to meet various developmental needs. In addition, one classroom offers specialized programming utilizing an Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) approach. Under the direction of a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), and in collaboration with the family and educational team, the children with an autism spectrum disorder or related disability receive evidenced-based interventions from a multidisciplinary team of professionals, including speech and language therapists, occupational and physical therapists, play therapist, social worker, and school psychologist.

For more information about the SPICE program, please contact: Michelle Hendricks, LMSW, Director of Early Education, Elmcrest Children's Center, 960 Salt Springs Road, Syracuse, NY 13224. Tel: (315) 446-3220; Fax: (315) 446-3274; E-mail: mhendricks@cnymail.com

Canandaigua City School District: A Continuum of Inclusive Programming for Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

The Canandaigua City School District offers students with an autism spectrum disorder a dynamic and supportive model of educational programming and services, across grades and school buildings. Within each building, a Core Team of professionals with expertise in autism spectrum disorders collaborates with parents, educational personnel and school administrators to develop individualized educational programs that include autism specific supports and services to meet the needs of the students. Emphasis is placed on providing direct services for addressing social communication and sensory needs, and behavioral difficulties, and teaching proactive learning and coping strategies, within an inclusive environment. As a student progresses through the grades, increasing em-

phasis is placed on supporting the student's independence, self-regulation, peer and other social interactions, and activities that prepare the student to transition to the post-secondary setting. **For more information about the program**, please contact: Canandaigua City School District, 143 N. Pearl Street, Canandaigua, NY. Tel: (585) 396-3700; E-mail:

thomasa@canandaiguaschools.org

The Communication and Social Skills Program (CaSS) program, located at Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES provides a unique educational program designed to meet the needs of middle and high school students who have a diagnosis of and/or demonstrate characteristics consistent with Asperger's Disorder. This program strives to honor the unique individuality of each student and to assist him/her in self-determination via a responsive and academically challenging environment. This is accomplished through the support of a multi-disciplinary team, a guide for implementing the New York State Learning Standards, links to community resources and a variety of other program elements and activities. These include an individualized assessment of the student's social and personal self-sufficiency skills needed for successful classroom, vocational, and post-secondary adaptation and a curriculum to teach needed social skills and self-sufficiency skills. Students participate in a Regents curriculum, are taught in an individualized, small group-learning environment, as well as included in academics and special subject areas. This program has been reviewed and validated as an "Effective Practices Program" by the New York State Education Department having demonstrated the effective use of evidence-based practices and successful outcomes for students.

College-Prep Academy at the University of Rochester

The summer of 2008 marked the inaugural session of a **College Prep Summer Academy**, sponsored by the **Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES Model Transition Program**, in coordination with the **Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities**.

Located at the University of Rochester, juniors and seniors from the **Communication and Social Skills Program (CaSS)** attended the academy, which focused on preparing the student to meet the social and organizational demands of college life.

Through a weeklong session, modeled on a typical college course, students were given a student ID, a syllabus and a "required textbook", **Succeeding in College with Asperger's Syndrome: a Student's Guide**, (Harpur, Lawlor, & Fitzgerald, 2004).

They toured various college departments, including the registrar, the library system, residential and student life, student health, and student support services. Students provided feedback on their experiences. **For more information about these two programs** and other programs offered by Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES, please contact: Joe Kelly, Director for Exceptional Children, Tel: (585) 352-2448; FAX: (585) 352-2796; E-MAIL:

jkelly@monroe2boces.org.

The Spectrum Support Pilot at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT): College Supports for Students with ASD

A new disability support service is being piloted through the Disability Services Office (DSO) at RIT. The program supports students with an ASD by assisting with the transition to RIT. Peer coaches, graduate students from RIT's School Psychology Program, assist students with the development of self-awareness and self-advocacy skills, and in skill building in social interactions, based on the student's personal goals. Weekly meetings focus on navigating the RIT college experience both in and out of the classroom. Resource information is also provided about campus services ranging from tutoring to counseling and career services that may provide additional support to the student. A case manager from the Student Affairs office coordinates data on student progress and prepares and submits a summary report to the student and the family at the end of each quarter. Information sessions and training about ASD have been offered to faculty and staff who are in direct student support positions, ranging from Residence Life to Academic Advisors to Faculty. In September 2008, the RRCASD provided an in-service workshop on college supports for students with ASD to 140 RIT employees. **For more information about the Spectrum Support Pilot Program at RIT**, please contact Susan Ackerman at smacst@rit.edu or visit the website at www.rit.edu/dso



RESOURCE REVIEW

by: Caroline I. Magyar, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities, University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry

Autism Speaks School Community Tool Kit (Autism Speaks, 2008)

The Autism Speaks School Community Tool Kit, published in 2008 by Autism Speaks, was designed as a reference tool to be used by school personnel working with students with an autism spectrum disorders (ASD), from kindergarten through high school. The Kit is 209 pages and is divided into short learning modules that allow for in-service training in schools or for readers wishing to learn about a specific topical area. The Kit provides information on: the features of ASD, federal mandates affecting the education of students with disabilities, instructional methods and interventions; and it features embedded links to additional resources including books, websites, and videos that can further increase reader knowledge of ASD and educational and intervention practices. The Kit also has a section that provides information for specific members of the school community. For example, there is a section for Bus Drivers and Transportation Supervisors, Office Staff, and School Nurses. An appendix includes forms and articles that can be used for additional reading and referencing, and can be used for in-service training purposes. The Autism Speaks School Community Tool Kit is available for **free** from Autism Speaks and can be found on the Autism Speaks website: www.autismspeaks.org/school.

REGIONAL RESEARCH UPDATE

by: Jill Delvecchio, MSW, Assistant Director & Linda Sullivan, MS. ED., Inclusion Specialist, Regional Early Childhood Direction Center (RECDC) at Monroe #1 BOCES.

The Regional Early Childhood Direction Center (RECDC) is collaborating with the RRCASD to pilot a Family Support Model in Monroe County. This model provides information and social support to families with children newly diagnosed with an ASD, who are receiving early intervention through the Monroe County Early Intervention Program. Families that choose to participate are provided with an in-home visit by a RECDC staff member to assist them in understanding the characteristics of the ASD diagnosis. The visit also includes providing information packets that contain written materials on different early intervention treatment models, program options and additional ASD resources. During this visit, additional informational and support needs are identified and appropriate information and resources are discussed and referral provided. A follow up contact by RECDC occurs approximately 30 days after the home visit to determine if the family requires additional information or referral.

Since June of 2008, RECDC has made over 40 home visits to families. Preliminary data indicate that families report several positive outcomes associated with their participation in this pilot program. One, they report being more informed about their choices in early intervention for their child. Two, they report an increased knowledge of resources for children with ASD. And, third, participants reported feeling less overwhelmed by the decisions they had to make about early intervention for their child.

This pilot project, born out of collaboration with the RRCASD enables the RECDC to create a seamless birth to 5-year-old resource to these families and to continue to provide information and technical assistance throughout the child's lifespan. Additional funds are being identified to assist with replicating this model in other counties.

For more information about this pilot program, please contact Jill Delvecchio, MSW, Assistant Director, Regional Early Childhood Direction Center, Monroe #1 BOCES, 585-249-7817.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION about the
Rochester Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders**
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Our 17 counties cover portions of Western NY, the Finger Lakes, the Southern Tier, and Central NY. We proudly serve: Broome, Cayuga, Chemung, Cortland, Livingston, Monroe, Onondaga, Ontario, Oswego, Schuyler, Seneca, Steuben, Tioga, Tompkins, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates Counties.

ASK THE EXPERT

Question:

I am a school administrator. How can I improve collaboration with the parents of my students with ASD?

Answer:

A response from Caroline I. Magyar, Ph.D., Associate Professor & Director, Rochester Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders, University of Rochester School of Medicine.

Developing effective school-parent partnerships or home-school collaboration, whichever term you would like to use, is a system-wide effort that involves all school personnel. There are numerous benefits to collaborating with parents, but the primary objective is to improve student learning. Establishing this as a goal within the district recognizes that a student's academic, social, and emotional development occurs across multiple settings, and therefore, including parents in decision making about educational program planning and progress monitoring is essential to good student outcome. This finding is supported in the research and in two pieces of educational legislation, No Child Left Behind (2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004).

To improve collaboration with parents and improve the learning of your students with ASD, there are a number of practices that you can put into place to ensure a meaningful parent-school partnership. First, ensure that your professional staff are trained in collaboration. If they aren't, seek out in-service training to provide them with the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for successful collaboration. This training should include information on how to engage parents of different cultures and lifestyles, and it should assist personnel in reducing any stereotypes and judgments they may have about different family values. Second, establish a proactive, problem-solving approach to parental involvement. This approach should convey to parents your belief that collaborative planning and problem-solving is needed to assist the student with ASD in his/her academic and social achievement. Consider creating an interdisciplinary team model that includes parents and establish a regular meeting schedule and communication system that balances student educational planning and problem-solving needs with parent values regarding their need for information and the level of involvement that is comfortable or effective for them. Outcomes of these meetings and communication should include practical and specific suggestions for supporting student learning within the home environment.

While no single approach or model will work with all families, as a school administrator, consider developing a school-or district-wide infrastructure that supports parental involvement and facilitates the building of relationships for effective home-school collaboration. Things to consider include making collaboration a priority, establishing a proactive and positive communication system, involving parents in shared decision making about their child's program, and providing outreach to parents to facilitate the establishment of effective social communication and behavior supports in the home.

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ROCHESTER REGIONAL CENTER FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS