

Summer Issue
2006

LDA of Florida State News

Tips for Proactive Planning for your Child's First Nine Weeks of School"

Judy N. Levin, Ed.D.

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We all remember what it feels like when, as children, the "Going Back to School Sales" began to appear in stores. There was a mixture of excitement and nervousness for new experiences and sadness that summer was ending. As parents of children who are a part of the exceptional education system, there is often stress as the next school year approaches. This stress can be related to past school experiences that were adversarial, to the reports you expect to come home about your child's challenges, and concern that your child will be misunderstood.

Although it is understandable to anticipate some difficulties, there are some steps to take to minimize the difficulties and to help ensure a smooth beginning of the school year for your child (and you!). First, review your child's IEP

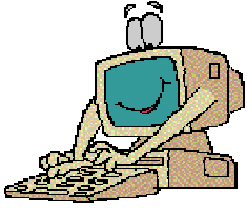
or 504 Plan prior to the school year to familiarize yourself with its contents. Then, send an e-mail to your child's teacher, principal, and to the school guidance counselor or staffing specialist to "introduce" your child. This letter should include information about what your child likes and dislikes, your child's strengths, and a short synopsis explaining the main points in your child's IEP or 504 Plan. In addition, make sure to include a portion that invites the teacher to contact you with any questions or concerns.

Next, schedule a meeting after the third week of school to meet with your child's teacher to review the actual IEP or 504 Plan and to gain information on how your child is adjusting to the new school year. At this time, set

up a communication system between you and your child's teacher that is convenient and beneficial to both of you. Do not make your child the "messenger" either through notes sent through your child or by notes in the planner. Rather, consider e-mail or a telephone call on a regular basis.

Both of these strategies help to ensure a team approach that can be established from the beginning. This positive connection established early on, will help when difficult situations arise. As tempting as it is to share your past frustrations, look at the school year as a new opportunity for your child.





Check out:
www.LDA-FL.org
 for more sites

Useful web sites

www.brainconnection.com

www.flace.org: FL Alliance for Choice in Education

www.interdys.org: Dyslexia Information

www.LDOnline.org: great resource

www.readingrockets.org: Help with reading difficulties.

www.schwablearning.org

www.eurekaalert.org: Breaking science, health, & technology news and research.

Learning Disabled Left Behind

By Joan Ryan,
 SF Chronicle

There's a girl I know who is a straight-A student in high school. She is poised, bright and organized, the kind who answers the extra-credit questions and keeps color-coded files for every class. But she reads as slowly as a grade-schooler. Her writing is barely legible. She can't spell. Like 2.5 million other students in the United States, she is dyslexic. At school, she comes in early and stays late to finish tests that require reading and writing. She uses a laptop so teachers don't have to slog through the tortured handwriting and misspellings to access the content of her work. She is soon going to face the SAT, just as my learning-disabled son will be. Her parents had assumed the purpose of this influential test is to assess a student's actual knowledge and capabilities. They gathered the required documentation about her dyslexia, which was diagnosed in second grade, and applied for

accommodations so her SAT score would reflect as accurately as possible her probability of college success. The girl requested to have twice the usual time to take the test and a laptop for the essay portion, the same accommodations she has at school. Her teachers, school administrators, doctor and others verified in letters that these accommodations allow her to compete intellectually with non-dyslexic classmates. The College Board, which administers the SAT, said no. It granted her time-and-a-half instead, and it won't let her use a laptop. "Her comprehension scores are in the above-average range, so I'm guessing that's why the College Board is saying she doesn't need more than time-and-a-half," the girl's mother said. She doesn't want her name used because the family is appealing the board's ruling. "Her reading rate is in the first percentile. She relies on context rather than decoding every word,

so it takes her lots of extra time to glean the meaning from what she's reading. So, yes, she has above-average comprehension but only because of the accommodations!"

Similar stories are playing out with increasing frequency across the country, disability advocates say. New York attorney JoAnne Simon says she has had more clients whose SAT accommodation requests have been rejected in the last two years than she had in the previous 10 years combined. "I used to very rarely tangle with the College Board," she says. "Now I do it every day." Brian O'Reilly of the College Board says the challenge is to keep the test as standardized as possible, offering the same questions in the same time span to all students. The board contracts with outside psychologists to review the accommodation requests. Sometimes their conclusions differ from what parents think the student needs. There are



Learning Disabled Left Behind

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Some situations where affluent students may be borderline learning disabled," O'Reilly said, "and their parents are making sure their son or daughter has every advantage possible." This suggests that at least some rejections are related to the myth that kids are trying to "game" the system by claiming to have learning disabilities. No one seems to have actual numbers, other than this: The College Board's approvals for accommodations have tripled since 1987. That's the number you hear bandied about. And it's true. The percentage of students receiving accommodations has increased from half a percent to less than 2 percent. Considering that about 10 percent of the student population have diagnosed learning disabilities, the number receiving accommodations seems too low rather than too high. Still, the gaming myth has been repeated so often everyone assumes it is true. No matter that research indicates that scores for non-LD kids go up only 4 or 5 points with unlimited time on the SAT while the scores for LD kids go up 40 or 50 points. No matter that anyone who can finish the test in three hours and 45 minutes, the standard time, is not all that interested in sitting there for another three just because he can. Still, the College Board is cracking

down on everyone in the name of protecting the test's integrity. Here's the sad, dumb irony. By denying learning-disabled students a fair opportunity to demonstrate what they really know, the board is undermining the test's integrity. It essentially is doing on purpose what it did by accident to 4,000 tests last fall: It is delivering inaccurate test scores to colleges and universities. The scores don't reflect what LD students really know. "We worship the numbers, but we forget that the numbers have to represent something meaningful," says Dr. Sally Shaywitz, a pediatrician and co-director of Yale's Center for the Study of Learning and Attention. The College Board's reluctance to grant accommodations disproportionately hurts minority and low-income kids, if California is any indication.

The state auditor released a report in 2000 that said 84 percent of "special" test takers were white, though white students accounted for just 64 percent of all test-takers. When the Los Angeles Times surveyed 10 inner-city schools a few years ago, not a single student among the 1,439 taking the SAT had received any accommodations. Some might say this reinforces the "gaming" notion. I would argue it reinforces the shortcomings of "standardization." The few

students who get accommodations have to jump through all kinds of hoops, sending to the College Board test results on cognitive ability, information processing and reams of other costly assessments. Lower-income students from schools with sparse resources are less likely to produce such documentation. "That's the overall tragedy in our minds," says Lisa Burger, an attorney for the Disability Rights Advocates in Berkeley. "Schools with more resources are able to do more testing to identify learning disabilities in the first place. It's the same students left behind over and over." In other words, it's not that too many white and affluent kids are getting the accommodations on the SAT. It's that too few non-white and low-income kids are. I'm not convinced the SAT is the best indicator of college success, but for now it's a fact of life for high school students. Learning-disabled students aren't looking for an easy way out. They're looking for a fair way in. Unless the College Board levels the playing field for them, the SAT is a standardized test that tests nothing more than a student's ability to take a standardized test.

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COMMENT BY LDA-FL President: Jacqueline Egli

There are many parents and professionals who are concerned about our students with learning disabilities being Left Behind as our educational system continues to go through reform. Reaching out to professionals and parents who are connected to organizations such as the Florida Chapter of the Learning Disabilities Association of America is one manner in which you can stay informed! Learning more about the process of identification of learning disabilities, and placement of students into the appropriate support programs, so students get the help they need is one benefit of membership in the **Florida LDA!**



Let's meet LDA-FL's Immediate Past President: Carolyn Tavel



Carolyn began her distinguished career in education with a focus on early childhood and learning disabilities. She has taught at numerous grade levels from pre-school on up, including teaching music, movement and even parenting classes on learning disabilities and ADHD. Her professional journey began in the 1970's, and began as a personal one as well when both of her children struggled with learning for various reasons. Since that time, Carolyn has worked tirelessly in this field to increase understanding of learning disabilities and give hundreds and hundreds of families hope and support.

After several dedicated years of working with parents and children of many and varied abilities, it was apparent to Carolyn

there was more work to be done in this field. Parents began to understand more about their children's special needs, thanks to Carolyn's dedication, and they began requesting more and more help in Central Florida.

Recognizing the growing need, it was at that time the Learning Disabilities Association of Central Florida sought funding for a Learning Disabilities Center and named Carolyn Tavel it's first Director. That was back in 1988, and Carolyn has served in that position for the past 16 years. Under her fine leadership, this Center provides parent and professional seminars and supports regional and statewide conferences, as well as support for IEP meetings and locating professionals in allied fields who can provide additional support when

needed.

In 2004, Carolyn began a new chapter in her life serving as a private consultant and Advocate for the many families who continue to need her. Because of her extensive knowledge and experience, Carolyn continues to bring hope and possibility to the many families who struggle to help their children in what seems so often an insurmountable maze of people and educational bureaucracy of people and educational bureaucracy. She is like a knight in shining armor and a beacon of light in the storm of confusion.

Thank you Carolyn for all that you, are and all that you do.

Email Carolyn at:

Ctavel@iaq.net

Meet LDA-FL's Recording Secretary: Mira Stulber Halpert

As we welcome Mira Halpert to our Board, we welcome her innovative spirit and are excited about all the possibilities she brings to this fine group of educators.

As a parent of four children, two with learning challenges, and living overseas, Mira's necessity was truly the mother of her invention. There was no support for parents or children in that time and place, so Mira started her own parent support group

and remediation strategies for her small community.

This is where her innovative spirit really began to shine and where she developed what is now her 3D Learner Program. This special program is designed to help the 62% of students who learn best when they see and experience information to "Be the Best they Can be".

"With my husband Mark and daughter Julie, the "original 3D learners"

we wanted to inform and empower parents, educators and other professionals in recognizing learning differences. This is in addition to teaching students about their strengths and addressing their challenges to help them become all that they can be." We have coined these children "GOLD students" which means "Gifted Operating with a Learning Difference". Along with her husband, Mira speaks to parents

"GOLD students"

Gifted

Operating with a

Learning

Difference

Mira Halpert

Meet LDA-FL's Recording Secretary: Mira Stulber Halpert

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and professionals all over the globe on "Unleashing the power of GOLD Students."

"I feel very lucky to be able to work with these kids and their parents – it reminds me everyday that

there are so many ways to look at the world if only we listen, see and learn from our children. It's so true that if our children are not learning like we want them to, maybe we need to teach them in a different

way."

Welcome Mira, we share your philosophy and applaud your innovative spirit.

Email Mira at:

Mira@3dlearner.com



Now, one of LDA-FL's Board of Directors: Dr. Alan Smolowe

It is indeed a pleasure to have Dr. Smolowe serve on the Board where he is able to share his passion and expertise to help promote better support services for SLD in Florida and nationwide. He comes to us with a tremendous educational background and experience in creating educational program models for national replication in public and private sectors for learning disabled people of all ages.

Currently, Dr Smolowe serves as the Founder and President of Summit Charter Schools, Inc. which was the first charter school operated in Central Florida. Since its inception in 1997, Dr. Smolowe has opened two more charter schools in our area with the purpose of providing an integrated instructional program to remediate learning disabilities in K-8 low-performing school

children.

Dr. Smolowe received his undergraduate degree in Political Science from Lehigh University in 1974, and his MBA in 1976, also at Lehigh in Marketing and Finance. He went on to receive his Ph.D. in Education in 1998 from the University of Orlando and his Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Barry University in 2003. He does a great deal of public speaking on special education and charter issues, and serves on various other Boards in our community including Hospice of Central Florida, the American Cancer society, among others.

We are extremely pleased to have Dr. Smolowe serve on our Board of Directors and look forward to continuing to broaden the many ways we can serve our special community. According to Dr. Smolowe, it's of

mutual benefit... he can be heard saying; "these special children touch my heart every day."

Thank you Dr. Smolowe for all that you have done to reach these amazing kids and us too!

Email Dr Smolowe at:

Smolowe@mindspring.com

Dr Smolowe serves as the Founder and President of Summit Charter Schools, Inc. which was the first charter school operated in Central Florida.



LDA-FL's Vice President: Kathleen Shatlock

I believe that we, as parents, educators, and advocates for the learning disabled, have a duty to help each child reach his/her full potential.

Kathy Shatlock

Kathleen Shatlock comes to us with a broad range of personal, professional experience, and education. There is no doubt our Board and the many children and families we serve will greatly benefit from her expertise and compassion.

Kathleen received her B.S. degree in Education from St. John College in Cleveland, Ohio, and her M.Ed. with a Reading Specialist Certification from Xavier University, also in Cleveland, Ohio. Additionally, Kathleen is E.S.E. Certified in Florida.

Kathleen currently serves as the Principal of PACE – Brantley Hall School, which is a school for children with learning disabilities, and prior to holding this esteemed title, she served as a teacher with PACE for 12 years.

She is the mother of 4 children, one of which has a learning disability, so Kathleen knows firsthand the difficulties parents and children face. "I believe that all children should be given the chance to learn as much as they are capable of learning,

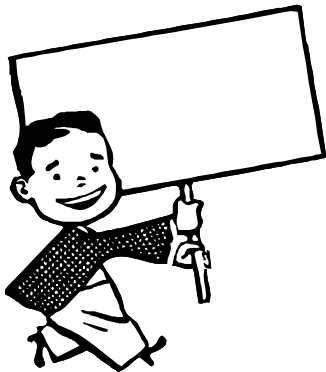
regardless of any learning disability. I believe that we, as parents, educators, and advocates for the learning disabled have a duty to help each child reach his/her full potential. This can only be accomplished if we continue to learn and be open to new thoughts and ideas. As a member of the LDA-FL Board, I hope to help make a difference in the lives of children in Florida."

From all of us Kathleen, we know you already have. Welcome to our Board!

Email Kathy at:

kshatlock@aol.com

WANTED: Advertisers



Would you like to advertise in the LDA of Florida State News? We are accepting ads that are ready for print. Our newsletter is done quarterly, Winter, Spring, Summer, and Fall. You can advertise in all four issues or you can choose to advertise in only one of the

above issues.

Our price list is as follows:

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\$125.00 1/4 Page

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These prices are for an

ad in all 4 newsletters.

Contact Cheryl at the State Office: 941-637-8957 and ask how can you place an ad in the newsletter.

**Your ad could be right here.
Call LDA-FL or email to
LDAF00@sunline.net**

LDA's Vice President of Projects: Julie Halpert

So many individuals have entered the field of special education, as a direct result of their own childhood challenges, and Julie Halpert is no exception. "I graduated from the University of Florida with the attitude that I wanted to be the best teacher – in fact I wanted to be the teacher I never had and help support others in pursuing their dreams." And as a Special Education Teacher in the field of autism, she has done just that, and then some!

Julie brings a great deal to our Board with her intimate "in the trenches" knowledge that is so crucial in this field. She truly knows we are in the business of people, and particularly children, and there is no more important task than

knowing these sweet, complex beings. In order to do so, Julie received both her undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Florida. Julie earned her Bachelor's degree in Special Education in 2003, and her Master's in Early Childhood Education in 2004.

We are so pleased to welcome Julie to our Board and know she will be an asset toward achieving our common goals. "I hope to show people that they are not alone. To provide resources to the parents who are completely overwhelmed and unsure what their child has or needs... or adults in the community who have grown up thinking that they are different and learning that the

skills they have might be different, but are better when used to their full potential." To that we say, go girl!

Email Julie at:

julesuf@yahoo.com



**"I graduated
from the
University of
Florida with
the attitude
that I wanted
to be the best
teacher"**

Julie Halpert

4th. Annual McKay Scholarship Conference

The 4th Annual Coalition of the McKay Scholarship Schools Conference will be filled with opportunities for your school with the varied program being offered. You will be:

1) Meeting with legislators and sharing your concerns and ideas as well as listening to their perspectives on the future of the McKay Scholarship

2) Participating in workshops aimed at helping your school develop even stronger programs for your students –

a) Building a Big Library on a Small Budget and Developing Enthusiastic Readers

b) Assisting your high school students in making the transition to post high school

c) Using and adapting on-line courses for your students (Florida Virtual School and the University of Miami On-line High School will be featured)

3) AND MORE!!

The 4th Annual Coalition of the McKay Scholarship Schools Conference is September 18th - 19th at the Doubletree Hotel in Tampa. Put those dates on your calendar! We will be sending you more information in the coming weeks. You may go to **Mckay Coalition website for registration forms:**

www.mckaycoalition.com

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