

EXTRA SPECIAL EDITION

Parent Newsletter

Fall 2016 - 2017

Welcome to **Edition 1** of the *Extra Special Edition* for the 2016-2017 school year, the newsletter for exceptional parents of Calhoun County. Each issue contains information for parents who have children in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program in our district.

Disability Awareness Month

The first two weeks of October of each year are Disability History and Awareness Weeks. This celebration was created by section 1003.4205, Florida Statutes. The law encourages schools to provide information about disability history and promote the awareness of the contributions of individuals with disabilities.

One of every five Americans is a person with a disability. A person may be born with a disability, may acquire a disability through an accident or illness, or may acquire a disability simply as a part of growing older. Despite the fact that disability is a natural part of life, people with disabilities have not always had access to equal opportunities. Not until 1975, with the passage of the Federal Education for All Handicapped Children Act (now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), did school-aged children with disabilities have a right to a free appropriate public education.

Florida started its first special education class in 1926 in Jacksonville. Since then, specially designed instruction and related services have expanded throughout Florida. Now, approximately 360,000 students identified as having a disability are participating in Florida's public education system. Many graduate and go on to postsecondary education or employment.

We are proud to participate in promoting awareness of disability history and the contributions of individuals with disabilities. For more information please visit the FLDOE disability awareness web page or for tips and fun facts the FDLRS PAEC Disability History Awareness website at

<http://www.paec.org/disabilityhistoryawareness>

Tips on Interacting with People with Disabilities

Ask before you help

Just because someone has a disability, don't assume she needs help. If the setting is accessible, people with disabilities can usually get around fine. Adults with disabilities want to be treated as independent people. Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it. A person with a disability will oftentimes communicate when she needs help. And if she does want help, ask how before you act.

Be sensitive about physical contact

Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance. Grabbing them, even if your intention is to assist, could knock them off balance. Avoid patting a person on the head or touching his wheelchair, scooter or cane. People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.

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*"What lies behind us
and what lies before
us are tiny matters
compared to what lies
within us"*

*-Ralph Waldo
Emerson*



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*Daylight Saving Time ends Sunday, November 6
Don't forget to set your clocks back 1Hour*



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Tips on Interacting with People with Disabilities continued

Think before you speak

Always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to his companion, aide or sign language interpreter. Making small talk with a person who has a disability is great; just talk to him as you would with anyone else. Respect his privacy. If you ask about his disability, he may feel like you are treating him as a disability, not as a human being. However, many people with disabilities are comfortable with questions about their disability after getting to know someone. A simple “I don’t feel comfortable sharing that” by the person with a disability can set the tone if it is not something that he/she is willing to share.

For more tips on interacting with people with disabilities please visit www.fldoe.org disability awareness page or go to www.unitedspinal.org/publications

What is an IEP?

A Federal Law, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (called “IDEA”) requires that public schools create an Individual Education Program, or IEP, for any student eligible for special education services. Children from age 3 through high school graduation or age 22 may be eligible for such a plan. The IEP, written each year, addresses the child’s unique learning needs and specific educational goals. Families are very important partners in the development of their child’s IEP.



Preparing for an IEP Meeting

1. Notice on the invitation, who will be attending the IEP meeting. Do not be intimidated if it is a lot of people. Each has unique ideas to offer. You may bring someone with you, as well. Your child may attend, if he/she is able to understand the proceedings and sit through a meeting.
2. Know your rights. The school will provide you with a copy of your Procedural Safeguards, but listen carefully as they are explained, and ask any questions that you need to have answered.
3. Keep well organized records, including copies of past IEPs, academic test results, medical information, evaluation reports, daily behavioral sheets, progress reports, communications from teachers and school personnel. Keep most current reports on top, to refer to them as needed.
4. Review academic and behavioral reports. Be prepared to discuss any changes that have occurred, and possible circumstances that may have affected performance or behavior.
5. Know and be ready to discuss your child’s strengths, including communication, social skills, and developmental milestones that have been attained. Brag a little!
6. Write down and bring a list of any concerns that you want to discuss during the meeting, so you won’t forget anything important that the team needs to consider.
7. Write down goals that you have for your child for the year. Think about the child’s current level, and where he/she could move in a year’s time for academic and social areas.
8. Take care of yourself during the meeting. Stay as calm, focused, and as relaxed as you can. Ask to take a break, if you need one.
9. Enter the meeting with a positive mindset. Assume that all the persons attending have your child’s best interests at heart. Listen to different points of view and ideas with an open mind.
10. Be an equal partner in the IEP process. Ask questions, offer suggestions and bring ideas to the table. Remember, your ideas are important. You are speaking for your child!

For more information please visit <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/ieps/understanding-individualized-education-programs>



Suggested Books for Children, Youth, and Families About Disabilities and Special Needs

There are many resources available from libraries and websites about individuals with disabilities. This list is intended as a starting point for children, youth, families, and others as they learn more about differing abilities. Please add to it as you discover additional resources and then please share your selected titles with others.

Title	Author	Disability
<i>Andy Finds a Turtle</i>	Nan Holcomb	Physical Disabilities
<i>Emily Good as Gold</i>	Susan Goldman Rubin	Developmental Disabilities
<i>Fair and Square</i>	Nan Holcomb	Physical Disabilities
<i>The Flying Fingers Club</i>	Jean F. Andrews	Deafness
<i>Keith Edward's Different Days</i>	Karen Melberg Schwier	Physical Disabilities – Down Syndrome
<i>Learning Disabilities and the Don't Give Up Kid</i>	Jeanne Gehret	Dyslexia/Learning Disabilities
<i>Leo the Late Bloomer</i>	Robert Kraus	Developmental Disabilities
<i>Sarah's Surprise</i>	Nan Holcomb	Augmentative Communication
<i>Wish on a Unicorn</i>	Karen Hesse	Developmental Disabilities

Peer Support: A Double WIN for Florida's Youth

As schools work to increase the access of their students with disabilities to general education classrooms and the benefits therein, the need to provide specialized supports and services to students with disabilities does not change. They require help in order to be successful in the courses that their non-disabled classmates are taking. One support system that schools are discovering is the use of peers as academic mentors.

A new course elective code adopted by the State of Florida in January 2016 is entitled "Peers as Partners in Learning." This allows for students to take an elective course, in which they are trained and supervised for becoming academic support to a student with a disability. They attend class together. The peer mentor (whose programs often give them a catchy title: "Pit Crew" at Timber Creek High School in Orlando, "Gator Aides" at Wewahitchka in Gulf County) assists the student with a disability in a variety of ways- dependent on learning needs. They may help with note-taking, restating verbal directions, staying on task, breaking a question down into its component parts, and so on. They do not give students the answers, work their Math problems for them, or manage challenging behaviors. While some students with disabilities have been initially reluctant to receive this level of support, most are sold on the idea as their grades begin to improve. Peer Support can be life-changing for some youth.

Students with disabilities achieve respectable grades in general education courses, but the ones providing the support receive rewards, as well. Having a review of skills by attending a course for a second time can improve their understanding of academic content. They become valued as leaders and are sought out by younger students for both academic support and social contact. They gain insight into another student's challenges as well as successes. Peer Mentors have a pre-employment experience that helps shape them into reliable and resourceful workers. Students often make a new friend!

If your school is interested in learning more about using peer students to support students with disabilities, or in beginning a "Peers as Learning Partners" program, suggest that they contact the Florida Inclusion Network or FIN, which is part of your region's FDLRS (Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resource Systems) program at FDLRS PAEC. FIN provides technical assistance to set up peer support, developing program criteria, plans for recruiting and training students, and even celebrating the program's success!

Tomorrow's Florida can benefit from today's students participation in such powerful programs!



McKay Scholarship

Parent Notification of McKay Scholarship

We would like to inform you that your child may be eligible to participate in the John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program, commonly known as the McKay Scholarship Program. This program was created to provide educational options to parents of disabled students. Currently, more than 19,000 Florida students are participating in this program.

By participating in the McKay Scholarship Program, your student may be able to attend a different public school in your district, attend a public school in an adjacent district, or receive a scholarship to attend a participating private school.

In order to be eligible for the McKay Scholarship Program, a student must apply for the program prior to withdrawing from public school. The student must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or an active 504 Accommodations Plan, and:

- Have been enrolled and reported for funding in a Florida public school for the school year prior to applying for a scholarship (Grades K- 12); or
- Have been a pre-kindergarten student who was enrolled and reported for funding in a Florida public school during the school year prior to applying for a scholarship; or
- Have attended the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind during the preceding school year's student membership surveys (Grades K- 12).

To find out if your student is eligible, you may apply for the McKay Scholarship on the School Choice Website at www.floridaschoolchoice.org. Select the McKay Scholarships link and then the link titled Apply for a McKay Scholarship on the menu bar on the left.

To learn more about your child's educational options, please contact your school district's Parental Choice Office. You may also contact the Department of Education, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice Information Hotline at 1 (800) 447-1636 or visit the School Choice Website at www.floridaschoolchoice.org and click the McKay Scholarships link.

In order for a student to be eligible for the program, intent to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program must be filed on the School Choice Website prior to withdrawing from public school.

Please note this letter serves to notify you that your child may be eligible to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program. This letter does not guarantee your student's eligibility



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"The Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System is funded by the State of Florida, Department of Education, Division of Public Schools and Community Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, through federal assistance under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B; IDEA Part B, Preschool; and State General Revenue funds."