First Federation Conference of the Millennium

On Saturday, March 17, the Federation for Children with Special Needs hosted its annual conference. A crowd of 600 parents, professionals, presenters and exhibitors gathered at the World Trade Center in Boston to demonstrate their commitment to students with special needs. Several state officials attended as well, including Debbie Klein-Walker, the Deputy Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and Gerry Morrisey, Commissioner of the Department of Mental Retardation.

The keynote speaker, Tom Hehir, special education teacher and visiting Professor of Education at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education, captivated the audience with his address, “Seizing the Opportunities under IDEA.” The presentation was full of inspiration, information, and cheer, and the audience was impressed with Dr. Hehir’s passion and enthusiasm. One participant commented that, “He understands that children who are disabled are also able.”

Laramee versus City of Worcester

by Daniel T.S. Heffernan, Esq.

In October 1994, Halina Suitum was removed from her classroom after an instructional assistant produced a diary describing the physical and emotional abuse to which she subjected her students. Ms. Suitum had been a teacher for several years in the Follow Me Program of the Worcester public schools, teaching a class of children with significant special needs. The Department of Social Services, and criminal investigation that ensued, revealed that Ms. Suitum had, for years, abused the pre-adolescents in her care by: hitting the children to the
REPEALING Maximum Feasible Benefit: Legislators Respond

One year ago, Massachusetts’s lawmakers voted to make dramatic changes to Chapter 766, our state’s special education law. This vote resulted in a major overhaul of the statute that protects the rights of students with disabilities. These changes affect virtually every step of the special education process, including eligibility, timelines, services, and student placement.

One of the most controversial changes was the repeal of the “maximum feasible benefit” (MFB) service standard. Despite the protests of thousands of parents, state legislators voted to adopt the less protective federal service standard, “free appropriate public education” or FAPE. The new law allows school districts to implement the federal FAPE standard beginning in January 2002.

Parents, advocates, and educators remain fearful that repeal of MFB will harm thousands of children with disabilities for the reasons summarized below:

- Some school districts will use the repeal of MFB as an excuse to cut services.
- The state Department of Education does not have the capacity to monitor local school districts to protect children with disabilities from loss of essential services, and in fact, the federal Office for Special Education Programs found the state in serious noncompliance for its failure to enforce the federal law at the local level.
- The repeal of MFB couldn’t come at a more inopportune time. Starting with the class of 2003, the state will require that all students pass the MCAS test in order to receive a high school diploma, yet is removing important legal protections that help ensure that children with disabilities receive the services necessary to learn to their potential.
- Delay repeal of “MFB” until the state has systems and procedures in place to ensure school districts comply with federal law (S.B. 229)
- Delay repeal of “MFB” until MCAS passage rates of students with disabilities significantly improve (H.B. 988, S.B. 333)
- Provide legal assistance to parents of children with disabilities who are low-income (S.B. 230)
- Provide funding to local special education Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) for parent outreach programs to help monitor provision of services during the transition (S.B.228)
- Maintain “MFB” (H.B. 2481, S.B. 310, S.B. 332)

Since the repeal of the Commonwealth’s MFB service standard, many new bills have been filed at the State House to protect children with disabilities. These bills respond to serious concerns that implementation of the federal standard alone, without the added protection of MFB will harm Massachusetts’s most vulnerable youth.

If passed, these bills, filed in both the House (H.B.) and Senate (S.B.) would require the Commonwealth to:

- Establish an understanding of what is a disability and the distinctions between and similarities among different types of disabilities,
- Explain the role of the assessment process in determining whether a student has a disability and is eligible for special education services,
- Provide direction to Team members in establishing the relationship between a student’s disability and the student’s inability to progress effectively in general education in order to determine whether a student is eligible for special education services.

The Joint Education Committee was scheduled to hold a public hearing on May 31 regarding these special education bills. (This hearing was postponed due to the funeral for U.S. Representative Joe Moakley). At this time it has not been rescheduled. It is very important that you call or write your state senator and representative and let him/her know you support this legislation. You can call the State House at 617-722-2000. If you are not sure who your legislators are, check the web at www.state.ma.us/sec/cis, or call your city or town hall. It is critical that legislators hear from concerned parents and educators. For updates and more detailed information about these bills, visit the Federation’s website at www.fcsn.org.

Determining Eligibility for Special Education Services

The Massachusetts Department of Education (DOE) has created a new technical assistance document about special education eligibility entitled, “Is Special Education the Right Service?” Although still in draft form, the document has been posted on the DOE web site (www.doe.mass.edu/sped) and is also available on the Federation’s web site at www.fcsn.org. Special education directors throughout the state have received training about eligibility for special education services. The DOE expects that this document, coupled with the state requirements and regulations, will provide guidance on “how to ensure a responsive general education environment and guidelines to assist practitioners and parents in identifying students with disabilities in the following ways:

- Establish an understanding of what is a disability and the distinctions between and similarities among different types of disabilities,
- Explain the role of the assessment process in determining whether a student has a disability and is eligible for special education services,
- Provide direction to Team members in establishing the relationship between a student’s disability and the student’s inability to progress effectively in general education in order to determine whether a student is eligible for special education services.”

For more information about determining eligibility for special education services, contact Program Quality Assurance at the DOE (781-338-3700) or speak with an information specialist at the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) at the Federation.
From the Executive Director
The Problem of Graduation

“I don’t know what to do!” These words were spoken by a parent who called the Federation for help in understanding the implications of the new graduation requirement in Massachusetts; beginning with the class of 2003, every student must pass the MCAS (Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System) test in order to receive a standard high school diploma. In this particular situation, the student has been receiving special education services his entire school career. The school told this parent that her son could graduate this year and receive a “regular diploma” since the MCAS requirement is not yet fully in place, or he can remain in school and face the MCAS standard.

The federal law, IDEA-97, states that students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) until they graduate with a standard diploma or until they turn 22 years old. Historically, many school districts have allowed (and even encouraged) students to “graduate” with their class upon the completion of their IEP (Individual Educational Program) goals. However, if they “graduate” before turning 22, these students are no longer eligible to receive special education services. Once implemented, the new MCAS requirement means that a student must be able to demonstrate basic competency requirements before educational services can be terminated. This means all students who receive special education services must demonstrate their ability to read, write and do basic math in order to graduate. Until this occurs, the student must, under federal law, continue to receive educational services until the age of 22.

As a parent, I want my child to “graduate” with his/her class. The social and emotional aspect of his/her participation in the graduation experience is important to my family and me.

The parent told me her son loves going to school and is doing well. He is reading at a 4th grade level, which far exceeds her wildest dreams for him. His math skills are elementary but he is learning to use money. He is 19. The school department feels it is time for him to graduate. She is his guardian and by law, she must consent. What is this mother to do?

There is no easy answer to her problem. My suggestion was for her to request that her son participate in the graduation ceremony with his classmates, accept a “certificate of completion” (which is not a diploma), and work with the school and adult service agencies to build a transition plan for the next 3 years. Building a transition plan will require hard work, cooperation, and creativity on the part of the school, the parent, the student, and the human service agencies. But at least this student will be able to “graduate” with his classmates, knowing there is a team of people working together on his behalf to provide the supports and services he will need for the next three years. If you have had an experience with a graduation decision, we would be interested in knowing about it. Please contact me at rrobison@fcsn.org or call 617-236-7210.

Richard Robison

Richard Robison

As a parent, I want my child to “graduate” with his/her class. The social and emotional aspect of his/her participation in the graduation experience is important to my family and me.

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Ask Eileen
Empowerment Through Information
by Eileen Souza, Federation Information Specialist

This column highlights questions that Eileen and the other Federation Information Specialists are most frequently asked.

Dear Eileen,
I know the law states that my child is entitled to have access to the general curriculum and I would like to make this happen in a meaningful way, but I don’t know where to begin. Can you help?

At the Federation, we receive many calls from parents who are concerned with how their child with a disability can meaningfully participate in learning what their peers are learning in the classroom. A number of federal and state laws such as IDEA ’97, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Chapter 766, the Massachusetts special education law, assure that children with disabilities have opportunities to participate in and benefit from the general curriculum. These laws mandate that schools provide accommodations, modifications, supports and services that children with disabilities need in order to be involved in and make progress in the general curriculum, and to do this in the least restrictive environment. However, for many parents, making this happen for their child is a struggle, and it is easy to become overwhelmed. This task becomes more manageable when your child’s IEP team works on it together.

As part of your preparation for Team meetings, ask about the curriculum for the upcoming year. Your district should have a well-defined curriculum for each grade that is aligned to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks (www.doe.mass.edu/frameworks/). Review the areas where your child has experienced successes and struggles during the previous year. Since all students differ in the way they learn most effectively and in how they demonstrate their knowledge, it is important to let the Team know your child’s strengths as well as his/her areas of need.

The regular education teacher will play an integral role on the team, providing hands-on knowledge of the expectations for all students. The regular education teacher should describe these expectations to the Team so that the other members can use their knowledge and expertise to adapt the upcoming activities to the student’s unique needs.

The Team will determine your child’s present level of educational performance in each curriculum area based on evaluation data, results from district and statewide testing, progress toward meeting current goals, information from you and observations from teachers and service providers. Other areas of educational need, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, social/emotional needs, or functional skills will also be taken into account. There is no one set of accommodations, modifications, services or supports that is appropriate for all children because each child is unique and will access the general curriculum in a different way. For some students, access to standard textbooks on audiotape might be helpful, for others working on projects with other classmates or taking quizzes or tests orally may give them greater access to the curriculum. Some students may need pre-teaching in small groups or co-teaching, where a general education teacher and a special education teacher work as a team in the classroom. For many students, assistive technology devices and services such as alpha smarts, voice-recognition software, and even calculators can help in increasing access. The trick is to build on the student’s strengths to help them overcome areas of weakness.

The Team will develop annual measurable goals and objectives so that you and the school will know whether or not your child is making meaningful progress. These goals should address your child’s progress in the general curriculum as well as in other areas of need. These goals should be meaningful and understandable for every one on the Team.

The goals should be reviewed throughout the year and this information should be shared with you through progress reports. Regular contact with both special education and regular education staff throughout the year will be necessary to keep things running smoothly.

Eileen Souza has decided to retire as of August 2001. Eileen has been an information specialist at the Federation for 23 years. We miss you already!
Laramee versus City of Worcester continued from page 1

point of fracturing one girl’s wrist; spanking the students and striking them with rulers and hairbrushes; brushing the children’s teeth so hard their gums bled; swearing at the children; belittling them; and, teaching one boy from Puerto Rico to recite a perverse “pledge of allegiance” of “God Bless America for food stamps.”

Perhaps even more disturbing than the actions of Halina Suitum was the discovery that aides and a teacher had reported on numerous occasions, and as early as three years prior to her removal from the classroom, that they had witnessed Ms. Suitum hitting students. These school personnel testified that they had made these reports to the principal and head teacher, and there was evidence that those higher up in the school administration were aware of the allegations against Ms. Suitum. Despite these reports, Ms. Suitum was never removed from the classroom, a 51A was never filed with the Department of Social Services, and the parents of the children were never informed about the accusations.

The damage done to the children from the years of witnessing and experiencing this abuse was extensive. Developmentally, they regressed or progressed very slowly during the years in Suitum’s classroom; profound behavior problems surfaced and intensified in the children. The effects of the trauma were still being experienced by the children years after Ms. Suitum was sent to prison. The parents also suffered tremendously after realizing not only that their children had been continually abused by the trusted teacher into whose care they had delivered their children for years, but that others had known of the abuse and failed to stop it.

On behalf of three students and their families, my colleagues and I filed a civil rights suit against the city of Worcester, the Worcester Schools and various school personnel. After years of depositions, expert examinations, exchanging documents and other pretrial matters, the case went to trial in federal court in Worcester in March 2000. After two weeks of trial, the city agreed to pay the families $1.5 million in settlement of their claims.

What is sad and tragic about the case is obvious—the damage done to the students and their families and the failure of some school personnel to properly respond to allegations of abuse against particularly vulnerable students. What is instructive about the case is that children with special needs should not be, as they were in the Follow Me Program, isolated in a classroom away from the watchful eye of other teachers and school administrators. All school personnel need to be educated and reinforced about their obligation to report and pursue allegations of child abuse, and parents must be made aware of any such allegations.

What is uplifting about the case is the ability of the legal system to bring compensation to victims as well as impetus for reform. The commitment of some school committee members and school administrators to seek to implement institutional changes to ensure that such tragedies do not reoccur; the courage of some school personnel to come forward to try to stop the abuse; and the strength, grace, courage, love and commitment of the Rinaldi, Laramee and Baez families, for whom it was my great honor to represent.

Dan Heffernan is a partner in the law firm of Weisman & Associates. He is also the parent of a child with special needs and President of the Federation Board of Directors.

Making SSI Work:
Tips for SSI Recipients Who Want to Work

For many people who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the fear of losing the accompanying health insurance—Medicaid—may keep them from getting a job. Medical insurance often plays a critical role in the lives of people with disabilities due to complex medical needs. This issue will review one of the SSI work incentives referred to as status 1619(b): Continued Medicaid Coverage, as well as other health insurance options for people who work.

Once determined eligible for SSI, one also receives benefits under the Medicaid program. This happens automatically, and no additional application needs to be filled out. In Massachusetts, the Medicaid program is referred to as MassHealth.

Will I automatically lose my MassHealth when I begin to work?

No. SSI checks are gradually reduced as earnings increase. When you earn enough money by working that you no longer receive a SSI monthly cash payment, you are said to have reached your “break-even point” (BEP). BEP’s vary for each person, depending upon the amount of SSI they receive. Mass Health eligibility will continue even after you reach your break-even point, as long as you would otherwise remain eligible for SSI (i.e. your disability still exists, and you continue to meet the resource limit). Although you would not be receiving SSI payments, you would be eligible for Continued Medicaid Coverage under status 1619(b).

Do I have to apply for Continued Medicaid Coverage?

1. No. The Social Security Administration (SSA) will automatically determine eligibility for 1619(b), and confirm this at the next determination period. When SSA contacts you, they will ask you three questions to confirm your eligibility for continued Medicaid. They want to verify that you need your Medicaid in order to work. The SSA may ask:

   • Have you used your Medicaid within the last 12 months?
   • Do you expect to use it within the next 12 months?; and
   • Will you need Medicaid if you become ill or injured within the next 12 months?

If the answer to these questions is “yes”, then the Medicaid “Needs” tests have been continued on page 12
Por Daniel T.S. Heffernan, Esq.

En octubre de 1994 a Halina Suitum no se le permitió enseñar más después de que una asistente de enseñanza escribió un diario en el que describía los abusos físicos y emocionales a los que esta profesora sometía a sus estudiantes. La señorita Suitum había sido profesora en el programa “Follow Me” de las escuelas públicas de Worcester por varios años, enseñando a una clase de niños con necesidades especiales significativas. El Departamento de Servicios Sociales, y la investigación criminal que se desató, reveló que la señorita Suitum había abusado por varios años de los pre-adolescentes que cuidaba pegándoles hasta el punto de romperle la muñeca a una niña; dándole palmas a los niños y pegándoles con reglas y cepillos de peinarse; cepillando los dientes de los niños tan duro hasta que sangraban, insultándoles; y enseñando a un niño de Puerto Rico a recitar un juramento perverso de “promesa de lealtad” de “Dios bendiga a América por las estampillas para comprar comida”.

Quizás más preocupante que las acciones de Halina Suitum fue el descubrimiento de que maestras ayudantes y una profesora habían reportado varias veces, aún tres años antes de la destitución del salón de clase, que habían visto a la señorita Suitum golpeando a los niños. Estas personas que trabajaban en la escuela dieron testimonio de que habían reportado los abusos con el principal y la maestra principal, y había evidencia que las autoridades en la administración escolar sabían las acusaciones en contra de la señorita Suitum. A pesar de los reportes, la señorita Suitum nunca fue destituida del salón de clase, nunca fue hecha una queja al Departamento de Servicios Sociales, y a los padres de los niños nunca se les informó de las acusaciones.

El daño ocasionado a estos niños que recibieron y experimentaron este abuso por varios años es muy grande. A nivel de su desarrollo, ellos regresaron o progresaron muy lentamente mientras estuvieron en la clase de la señorita Suitum; problemas de disciplina profundos e intensos se notaron en los niños. Los efectos del trauma en los niños todavía se notaban algunos años después de que la señorita Suitum fue enviada a prisión. Los padres también sufrieron bastante al comprender no sólo que sus niños estaban siendo abusados continuamente por la maestra en quien confiaban a sus hijos sino que otros sabían de la situación y no hicieron nada para detenerla.

Lo que es triste y trágico sobre el caso es obvio: el daño hecho a los estudiantes y sus familias y la ineficacia del personal escolar para responder adecuadamente a las acusaciones de abuso en contra de estudiantes particularmente vulnerables.

Mis colegas y yo hemos entablado en nombre de tres estudiantes y sus familias una demanda de derechos civiles en contra de la ciudad de Worcester, las escuelas de Worcester y varias personas de la escuela. Después de varios años de testimonios, exámenes con expertos, intercambio de documentos y otros oficios antes del juicio, el caso fue a la corte federal en Worcester en marzo del 2000. Después de 2 semanas de juicio la ciudad aceptó pagar a las familias un millón y medio de dólares como arreglo a sus demandas.

Lo que es triste y trágico sobre el caso es obvio –el daño hecho a los estudiantes y sus familias y la ineficacia del personal escolar para responder adecuadamente a las acusaciones de abuso en contra de estudiantes particularmente vulnerables. Lo que se puede aprender del caso es que los niños con necesidades especiales no deben estar aislados, lejos de la vista de otros profesores y administradores escolares tal como los niños que estaban en el programa “Follow Me”. Todo el personal escolar necesita ser educado y preparado sobre la obligación de reportar y hacer las acusaciones de abuso de niños, y los padres tienen que saber que tales acusaciones se han hecho.

Lo que es positivo en este caso es la habilidad del sistema legal para compensar las víctimas lo mismo que el incentivo hacia una reforma. El compromiso de algunos de los miembros del comité escolar y administradores escolares para buscar la implementación de cambios institucionales para asegurar que tragedias como estas no vuelvan a ocurrir; el coraje de miembros del personal escolar para denunciar y tratar de parar el abuso; y la fuerza, la gracia, el valor y el compromiso de las familias Rinaldi, Laramee y Baez quienes fue un honor representar.

(Dan Heffernan es un socio en la firma de abogados Weisman & Associates. También es el padre de un niño con necesidades especiales y el Presidente de la Junta Directiva de la Federación)

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Beyond the Ramp is an initiative of the Jewish Community Centers of Greater Boston and the Special Needs Professional Committee of the Greater Boston Jewish Community
LARAMEE v. CIDADE DE WORCESTER

Por: Daniel T.S. Heffernan, Esq.

Em outubro de 1994 a professora Halina Suitum foi retirada de sua sala de aula depois que uma assistente de aprendizagem havia descrito, em seu diário, os abusos físicos e emocionais aos quais ela sujeitava seus alunos. A Srta. Suitum era professora há vários anos no Follow Me Program (Programa Sigam-me) das escolas públicas de Worcester, lecionando para uma classe de crianças com necessidades especiais significantes. O Departamento de Serviços Sociais, bem como a investigação criminal que se seguiu, revelaram que a Srta. Suitum havia, por vários anos, abusado dos pré-adolescentes aos seus cuidados da seguinte maneira: batendo nas crianças, ao ponto de ter fraturado o pulso de uma menina; dando tapas nos alunos e acertando-os com régua e escovas de cabelo; escovando os dentes das crianças tão asperamente que as gengivas sangravam; falando palavrões para as crianças; rebaixando-as moralmente; e, também, ensinando um menino de Porto Rico a recitar o juramento de devoção do God Bless America para os tiquetes de alimento”.

Talvez ainda mais perturbador do que as ações de Halina Suitum foi a descoberta de que uma professora e outros assistentes haviam denunciado que, em inúmeras ocasiões e três anos antes de sua demissão, haviam testemunhado a Srta. Suitum batendo nos alunos. Estes funcionários da escola testificaram que tinham feito essa denúncia para a direção e para o professor coordenador, e de que havia, portanto, evidência de que os maiores da administração da escola sabiam das alegações contra a Srta. Suitum. Apesar dessas denúncias, a Srta Suitum nunca fora removida da sala de aula, nunca fora registrado um 51 A (uma péticia formal) junto ao Departamento de Serviços Sociais, e nem os pais das crianças jamais foram informados a respeito das acusações.

O dano feito a essas crianças, que testemunharam e sofreram esses abusos por anos, é enorme. Em termos de desenvolvimento, os alunos regrediam ou progrediam muito lentamente durante os anos em que estiveram na sala da professora Suitum; problemas profundos de comportamento emergiram e se intensificaram nas crianças. Os efeitos do trauma eram sentidos por elas mesmo anos após a Srta. Suitum ter sido enviada para a prisão. Os pais também sofreram tremendoamente quando se deram conta de que não só os seus filhos haviam sido abusados pela professora que tanto confiavam, a qual haviam entregue os seus filhos para tomar conta por anos, mas que outros sabiam da situação e falharam em cessá-la.

No interesse dos três alunos e suas famílias, eu e meus companheiros de profissão movemos uma ação judicial contra a cidade de Worcester, o sistema escolar de Worcester e, também, vários profissionais do quadro de pessoal da escola. Após anos de depoimentos, exames técnicos, troca de documentos e outros assuntos antes do processo, o caso foi a julgamento n a corte federal de Worcester, em março de 2000. Duas semanas depois de iniciado o processo, o caso foi reiterado sobre as suas obrigações em denuciar e averiguar quaisquer alegações de abuso infantil, sendo que os pais devem ser prontamente alertados de tais alegações.

O que é animador neste caso é a habilidade do sistema judicial em trazer uma compensação para as vítimas e, ao mesmo tempo, impulsionar reformas. O compromisso de certos membros do comitê e dos administradores escolar em buscar implementar mudanças institucionais para garantir que tragédias como essas não voltem a ocorrer; a coragem de alguns profissionais da escola em ir adiante e tentar parar com o abuso; e a força, a graça, a coragem, o amor e o devotamento das famílias Rinaldi, Laramee e Baez, às quais foi, para mim, uma grande honra poder representar.

(Dan Heffernan é socio do escritório de advocacia Weisman & Associates. Ele também é pai de uma criança com necessidades especiais e Presidente da Federation Board of Directors).

Marca a data!
A conferência anual da Federação acontecerá
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World Trade Center
Boston, MA

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La Conferencia anual de la Federación tendrá lugar el
9 de febrero del 2002
World Trade Center
Boston, MA
Upcoming Federation Workshops

For more information about any workshops, please call the Federation at 800-331-0688. Call to find out about Basic Rights workshops in Portuguese. Ligue para informação sobre aulas iniciando em Português.

SEPTEMBER 2001
9/11, Lowell 7:00-9:00pm, Basic Rights
9/17, Amherst 6:30-8:30pm, Basic Rights
9/24, Hadley 6:30-8:30pm, Basic Rights
9/25, Foxboro 7:00-9:00pm, IEP 2000

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTIONS

Basic Rights: covers basic information about state and federal special education laws to assist parents in the planning, decision-making and monitoring of their child’s IEP. (Materials available in Spanish and Portuguese.)

Effective Communication: offers communication skill building and conflict resolution for parents as members of the IEP Team.

IEP 2000: includes a walk through of the new IEP with emphasis on IDEA ’97 and the latest Massachusetts special education regulations, access to the general curriculum, and writing curriculum-based measurable annual goals.

Transition: provides basic information on the state and federal laws that require the IEP to address goals such as competitive employment and independent living to assist students 14 and older with planning transition to adult living.

Access to the General Curriculum: offers parent-friendly information on diverse learning styles and access to the general curriculum for all students. The workshop includes discussion and examples of modifications to content, delivery of instruction and performance that will allow students with disabilities fuller participation in the general curriculum.

Effective Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in the MCAS Testing System: includes information on the IEP Team determination of the appropriate method for an individual student to participate in the MCAS testing system. The workshop covers accommodations available to students with disabilities taking the standard paper and pencil version of MCAS as well as information on the MCAS Alternate Assessment.

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Learning About Service Coordination: Mass EI System to be Studied

The Massachusetts Early Intervention System has been chosen to participate in a national project about service coordination. Service coordination is an essential component of early intervention services; it constitutes the activities that assist and enable an eligible child and the child’s family to receive the rights, procedural safeguards and services that families are entitled to receive through each state’s early intervention system. These services may include helping families obtain services and assistance from other agencies in addition to the early intervention services families receive from their local program. A service coordinator, who is assigned to the family, facilitates these activities.

This national project was created in response to a need for improvement in how services are coordinated for children and families in early intervention. The Research and Training Center on Service Coordination, housed at the University of Connecticut, is conducting this five-year study. Other partners include the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Indiana University, and the Federation for Children with Special Needs. The goals include:

1. Describing the current models of service coordination used across the nation,
2. Identifying the outcomes of effective service coordination,
3. Describing recommended practices,
4. Validating effective components, and
5. Disseminating the information.

During year one, the Center focused on determining the outcomes of effective service coordination. They gathered information in a variety of ways. Part C (early intervention) coordinators and families who receive early intervention services in all 50 states were surveyed. More information was collected during focus groups held in the four partner states. Focus group participants included early intervention providers, program directors and families as well as childcare providers and physicians. In Massachusetts, eleven focus groups were held throughout the state, with participants from urban, suburban, and rural communities. After all the information was compiled, the Center created a list of the 10 outcomes that were most valued by all the participants. This list is the basis for the second year’s series of focus groups.

In Massachusetts, family members, early intervention program directors, and other early intervention providers are being asked to participate in another round of focus groups to identify the practices we need to implement in order to reach the 10 outcomes that were identified in year one. In the remaining three years, this information will be used to implement change in current practices regarding service coordination.

It is exciting for Massachusetts to be participating in this study. Our state has the opportunity to contribute to this current and very timely research on an essential component of early intervention. Participants have the opportunity to speak out about their own experiences, hear from others in the same role, and eventually work together to improve service coordination in Massachusetts. Ultimately, this will mean a system that continues to grow in its ability to successfully provide meaningful, coordinated, and family-centered services and supports for children and families being served by the early intervention system nationwide.

For more information about this project or to participate in a focus group, please call Janet Price at the Federation at 1-800-331-0688, ext. 157 or e-mail her at jprice@fcsn.org.

Early Intervention Training Center Workshop Schedule: July 2001 – September 2001

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<th>Month</th>
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<td>JULY 2001</td>
<td>Tuesday, July 24:</td>
<td>Building a Community: An Orientation to MA EI, Part 2, Ramada Inn, Andover</td>
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<td>AUGUST 2001</td>
<td>Wednesday, Aug 15:</td>
<td>Building a Community: An Orientation to MA EI, Part 2, Holiday Inn, Worcester</td>
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The Early Intervention Training Center is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Save the Date! The Federation’s Annual Conference will be held on February 9th, 2002 at the World Trade Center, Boston, MA
Parent participants discuss the day’s events.

This year’s conference was a great success and helped confirm our important role in helping families of children with special needs maximize their children’s futures! The conference was a wonderful collaboration by Family TIES (Together In Enhancing Support) and PAL (Parent Advocacy League), who are part of the Federation, as well as Massachusetts’ Families Organizing for Change. We extend our thanks to Polly Sherman, the chair of the conference planning committee, the committee members, the volunteers, exhibitors, and the presenters, and of course, the many family members who took the time to attend. We look forward to seeing you all again next year!
NewsLine
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The Federation for Children with Special Needs, Inc.
Our Mission:
To provide information, support, and assistance to parents of children with disabilities, their professional partners, and their communities. We are committed to listening to and learning from families, and encouraging full participation in community life by all people, especially those with disabilities.

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Executive Director:
Richard J. Robison
Making SSI Work
continued from page 5

met. Family members should monitor earnings monthly and contact the SSA as soon as SSI cash payments stop to insure that the 1619(b) determination is made.

Will there be a point when my Medicaid will end?
Yes. Your gross earnings must fall below a threshold amount in order to remain eligible for Medicaid. In 2001, the threshold amount for a person with disability in Massachusetts is $25,486.36. Earnings at or above this amount are considered to be enough to replace the cost of Medicaid coverage. You may later qualify, however, if your earnings fall below this amount within 12 months and all other eligibility criteria continue to be met. Individualized threshold amounts can be computed if there are unusually high medical costs, work expenses or a Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS).

What if I can’t afford health insurance but I am earning too much to receive Medicaid?
If you lose your medical coverage due to increased earnings, you may buy into the Medicaid program. In Massachusetts, this is called the CommonHealth program. It allows people with disabilities who are working to purchase Medicaid. There are no resource limits for purchasing CommonHealth, as there are for SSI/MassHealth eligibility. Members pay a monthly premium according to a sliding scale fee based on income and family size. For more information about CommonHealth, call the Disability Law Center at the number below or call Health Care For All at: (800) 272-4232 TTY: (800) 954-5258.

This is a product of Opening Doors, a collaborative project of the Institute for Community Inclusion, Federation for Children with Special Needs, and the Disability Law Center on increasing utilization of SSI work incentives. For more information about MassHealth, call:
The Disability Law Center
(617) 723-8455

Suggested topics for future newsletters are welcomed. If you have questions related to SSI and SSI work incentives, contact:
Elena Varney
Institute for Community Inclusion/UAP
Children’s Hospital
300 Longwood Avenue
Boston, MA 02115
(617) 355-8022

What if I can’t afford health insurance but I am earning too much to receive Medicaid?

YES! I will help the Federation continue its Mission! I want to support the Federation for Children with Special Needs.
Enclosed is my gift.
☐ $30     ☐ $50     ☐ $100     ☐ $250     ☐ $500     ☐ Other $ _________

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Company name:

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☐ I would like to make my contribution in honor of:

☐ I would like to make my contribution in memory of:

Please include this form with your check made payable to:
Federation for Children with Special Needs, 1135 Tremont Street, Suite 420, Boston, MA 02120
The Federation for Children with Special Needs, Inc. is a 501(c)3 organization.

Now you can donate online! Visit us on the web at www.fcsn.org.
Teaching Students with Disabilities to Read

This PEER Resource Booklet introduces parents and teachers to aspects of effective reading instruction that should be considered when teaching reading to students with disabilities. The booklet is organized into seven chapters. Each chapter describes essential skill building and teaching activities. Chapters include: phonological awareness, systematic phonics instruction, word identification, supported passage reading, fluent reading, reading comprehension, and early intervention in reading.

42 pages. 2000. $8.00

Every Single Student

Every Single Student: A PEER Resource Manual on Standards-Based Education and Students with Disabilities covers a broad range of topics relevant to the education of students with disabilities in today’s schools. With national attention now focused on improving education for all students, this manual provides practical information to help parents, teachers, and advocates understand standards-based education reform and ensure that students with disabilities benefit from education reform efforts.

97 pages. 1999. $35.00

Available in English or Spanish (Todo Alumno).

2001 Summer Camp Directory:
A Listing of Day and Residential Summer Camp Programs

Published annually by the Federation, the Summer Camp Directory booklet provides information on 80 day and residential summer camps, plus a listing of local community resources. It provides guidelines for selecting a camp, and suggestions for including children with disabilities in regular camps.

44 pages. 2001. $6.25

Preventing Reading Difficulties Through the Early Identification of Children with Special Literacy Needs

Learning to read is a gradual process that starts long before children begin formal schooling. This resource brief helps parents and professionals to identify factors that may interfere with literacy development in young children. The purpose of early identification is not to attach labels to children, but to provide intervention as early as possible, thereby preventing later reading difficulties.

10 pages. 2000. $3.00

Federation Publications Order Form

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order by phone (800) 331-0688
Teams of family leaders have completed interviews with seven managed health care plans in Massachusetts; three more are planned. Similar interviews are underway in 10 other states as part of this national project, funded by the Packard Foundation, with the assistance of New England Serve and the Department of Public Health in Massachusetts.

We extend special thanks to the excellent teams of parents in Massachusetts who conducted these interviews. Additionally, we thank the staffs of the managed care organizations that generously donated their time to participate in these important discussions about the issues faced by children with special health care needs within the managed health care system.

The interviews have sparked concrete ideas of how families might learn more about health plans and how plans might learn more about the needs and concerns of families of children with special health care needs. The information from the interviews, when completed, will be summarized and shared with participants and interested others as a tool for further discussions.

One of the goals of the project is to establish relationships between family groups and health insurers to ensure that children with special health care needs are well served by their managed care plans. Our next step is the Massachusetts Forum for Children with Special Needs in Managed Care, to be held on Friday, October 26, 2001. Family leaders, staff of managed care plans, health providers, and state and local program and policy staff will be invited to this day of discussion and planning around the issues of children with special health needs in managed care in Massachusetts.

**SAVE THE DATE!**
Massachusetts Forum for Children with Special Needs in Managed Care
Friday, October 26, 2001

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**New Website for Families!**
www.brightfuturesforfamilies.org

Visit the site to learn about the Bright Futures project and how you and health care providers can be partners in caring for your child.

Share your ideas or get suggestions from others.
Visit the Bright Futures Family Talkcard interactive web pages to exchange ideas and tips about specific parenting issues.

Download Your Own Copy of:
- Bright Futures Family Pocket Guide
- Bright Futures Family Talkcard Sets
- Bright Futures Health Care Visit Checklists

*Bright Futures for Families is a Family Voices project at the Federation for Children with Special Needs.*

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**Introducing**
massfamilyvoices.org

Introducing www.massfamilyvoices.org, your online connection to Massachusetts Family Voices, the state chapter for Family Voices, a national grassroots organization speaking out for families with children with special health care needs.

**Visit the website and find:**

**Insurance Corner and other programs of interest:**
- Frequently Asked Questions about MassHealth (formerly known as Medicaid)
- Information about the Medical Home Initiative
- Information about public benefits programs
- Hotline numbers

**Legislative News:**
- Updates on pending Massachusetts bills and budget items
- Updates on federal bills and budget items

**A Family Voice:**
- Personal stories of families here in Massachusetts

**Activities:**
- Mass Family Advisor Initiative project

**Benefits of adding your voice to Mass Family Voices:**
- Belong to a network of families
- Receive quarterly informational mailings
- Make a difference in Massachusetts

**How to connect with us:**
If you want to join, have information to share or comments about the web site, please contact: Polly Sherman at polly.sherman@state.ma.us or 1-508-947-1231; Peggy Curran at pcurran@fcsn.org or 1-800-331-0688, ext. 155

In collaboration with the Federation for Children with Special Needs
Affordable Drug Coverage for Massachusetts Elders and People with Qualified Disabilities

At a time when the rising cost of medication is on everyone’s mind, Massachusetts has created a new option for affordable prescription drug coverage. On April 1, 2001, the Prescription Advantage plan went into effect. It provides elderly citizens and persons with qualified disabilities affordable, comprehensive prescription drug coverage.

The Massachusetts Executive Office of Elder Affairs administers this plan, which replaces the Commonwealth’s PHARMACY Program and PHARMACY Program Plus. Prescription Advantage covers the same individuals who had been enrolled in those plans, but provides a higher level of coverage to more people.

Prescription Advantage is open to most Massachusetts elders. Basically, any elder who is a resident of Massachusetts and is not a member of any MassHealth program (Massachusetts’s Medicaid programs), is eligible for Prescription Advantage. Enrollees must be:

1. 65 years old or older; or
2. Less than 65, have a qualified disability, have a gross annual household income of less than $15,708 for individuals or $21,156 for married couples, and either do not work, or work 40 hours or less per month; or
3. Enrolled in the PHARMACY Program or PHARMACY Program Plus as of March 31, 2001.

Prescription Advantage pays for most prescription drugs, including insulin and disposable insulin syringes with needles.

Monthly premiums and annual deductibles are determined on a sliding scale based on household income. In cases of very low income, Massachusetts will pay the premiums and deductibles, with the insured only paying the prescription co-payment. Higher income enrollees pay a maximum monthly premium of $82 and a maximum annual deductible of $500.

Unlike most prescription drug plans, Prescription Advantage has no limit on benefits. No enrollee will pay more than $2,000 or 10% of their income (whichever is less) in annual out-of-pocket expenses.

At a time when elders and persons with qualified disabilities are worried about their quality of life and how prescription drug costs will affect them, Prescription Advantage is worth investigating. First-of-its-kind in the nation, Prescription Advantage will enable elders and persons with qualified disabilities to have the prescription drug coverage they need at a reasonable cost.

Enrollment Forms for Prescription Advantage are available by calling toll-free, 1-800-AGE-INFO (1-800-243-4636), by logging onto www.800AgeInfo.com, or toll-free by teletypewriter (TTY) at 1-877-610-0241. Forms can also be obtained by mail at: Prescription Advantage, PO Box 15153, Worcester, MA 01615-0153.

FAMILY VOICES is a national grassroots organization of families and friends speaking on behalf of children with special health care needs. The Federation is one of the founding members of Family Voices and conducts Family Voices projects from the Federation office in Boston.

Do you or anyone you know have a child or adolescent whose life is affected by an emotional, behavioral, or mental health disorder? If so, you will want to participate in a series of workshops called Visions for Tomorrow.

In March 2000, the Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PAL), in collaboration with NAMI-MASS, sponsored an intensive training for 30 people who will soon be teaching Visions for Tomorrow. Visions for Tomorrow is an educational course for parents and other caregivers of children who have been diagnosed with brain disorders as well as those who exhibit behavior that strongly suggests such a diagnosis. The Visions curriculum balances educational materials and skills training with self-care, emotional support and empowerment. ADD/ADHD, PDD/Autism, Tourette Syndrome, Conduct Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Depression, Eating Disorders, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Schizophrenia, Panic Disorder, and Anxiety Disorders are a few of the diagnoses addressed in the curriculum.

There is no charge for the course. A binder with materials will be given to each person who attends the classes. The course has been designed and written by experienced caregivers, family members, and professionals in Texas and is being offered for the first time in Massachusetts. Visions classes will be offered at many locations throughout the state. For more information, or to register, call Anne Khudari at 800-370-9085 or Lisa Lambert at 800-537-0046.

(PAL is the Massachusetts Chapter of the Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health and works in collaboration with the Federation for Children with Special Needs).

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Help Wanted!

INFORMATION SPECIALIST
Federation for Children with Special Needs, Hyannis Office
Parent Training and Information (PRI) Center

Summary: Information Specialists provide information, technical assistance, and follow-up support to parents of children with special needs, and their professional partners, with the goal of providing quality educational services to all. Information is shared via telephone contact, at Federation workshops, and through community outreach.

This 20-hour per week position is primarily based at the C.O.R.D. Office in Hyannis, MA and requires a motivated self-starter who is able to work independently. Support and guidance is provided from the Federation’s Boston office.

To apply, send resume and cover letter to: Margaret Marotta Smith, Associate Director Special Education Projects, Federation for Children with Special Needs, 1135 Tremont St., Boston MA 01220. (email: msmith@fcsn.org)

PARENT COORDINATOR
Family TIES, Western Region

Family TIES, the statewide information and support network for families of children with special needs, is hiring a Parent Coordinator in the Western Region of the state. This is a 20-hour per week position, with benefits.

Applicants must:
• Have strong communication, interpersonal and presentation skills,
• Be knowledgeable of the laws and services for children with disabilities,
• Have experience working with other parents,
• Must be able to travel within the state.
• Computer skills (Microsoft Access) and bilingual a plus.

Send resume and/or letter of interest to: Polly Sherman, Family TIES Network Director, Department of Public Health—Southeast Regional Office, 109 Rhode Island Road, Lakeville, MA 02347
Phone: 617-727-1440, FAX: 617-727-9296

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
Federation for Children with Special Needs

Family Voices at the Federation for Children with Special Needs is looking for part-time administrative help, 15 – 20 hours per week.

For more information, call Nora Wells or Peggy Curran at 1-800-331-0688 or e-mail: nwells@fcsn.org or pcurran@fcsn.org.