Recap: Rising to the Challenge 2020 Gala

FCSN thanks you for a magical evening at the Rise to the Challenge gala. The event was our very first virtual gala and was livestreamed on FCSN’s Facebook and YouTube channels.

Equitable Services Plan

Are you Home-Schooling Your Child with Disabilities? Your Child May be Eligible for an Equitable Services Plan, in addition to an IEP

Tips for Successful Remote Therapy Sessions

It is Fall, school has begun, and students are receiving related services as part of their IEP. For some students, these services will be in-person, but for others they will

Making A Difference Conference

So are you feeling a little more settled in now that school has restarted? The weather is starting to change, as is the light in the evening. Some things are still going to happen, but maybe just with a new twist. And that goes for RTSC’s Making a Difference Conference!
Dear Friends,

What do all of these things have in common?

- Bruce Springsteen releases “Born to Run” album
- Premiere of Jaws
- Vietnam war ends
- BIC launches first disposable razor
- A group of mothers have the extraordinary foresight to create an organization that would provide parents and professionals with the information and support they need to care for children with special needs.

All of this took place 45 years ago. While the world continues to change and evolve, one constant is the mission of the Federation: to inform, educate and empower all families.

Forty-five years ago the guiding principles of our founders - that all individuals, regardless of their challenges, deserve an opportunity to reach their full potential - hold true today.

The theme of this newsletter is Adapting to Change, and you can read about all the ways the Federation has adapted to our current world while remaining true to the vision of our founders. While our mission remains as important as ever, we constantly are looking for new ways to ensure that all children have the opportunities to reach their potential.

Some of the new offerings you will see from the Federation include Mindful Mondays for educators to take a moment of self-care; monthly Family Connections in English and Spanish for parents and caregivers to have time to talk with each other. MassPac Monday, Wellness Wednesday and Focus Fridays – our twice weekly Facebook Live events to offer timely information, advice and
regional meetings for SEPAC leaders...trauma training for caregivers...Telehealth educational forums to support families of children with special health needs.

As our country is grappling with our twin pandemics of COVID and racial inequity, the Federation has worked hard to ensure that all children have the same opportunity to reach their potential. We have pivoted to use the resources at our disposal to reach families in a virtual world. We have redesigned and offered new trainings and resources to meet current need. Our outreach team has reached out to the Latino, Chinese, Haitian and Portuguese communities to engage and support families and children with special needs and support youth and family groups who continue to meet virtually. To better meet the needs of all families, the Federation has hired a new outreach specialist to work with Black communities, families and children around the state. This will help ensure that a strong family and youth voice for Black families is part of our conversation, advocacy and change.

It is through your support and participation that the Federation continues to be a leader in developing policy that changes the world and changes the lives of children for the better.

Thank you for being part of the Federation family.

With gratitude,

Pam Nourse
Recap: Rising to the Challenge 2020 Gala

The Federation for Children with Special Needs thanks you for a magical evening at the Rise to the Challenge gala. The event was our very first virtual gala and was livestreamed on FCSN’s Facebook and YouTube channels.

Heather Hegedus of Fox 25 News emceed the event where she shared from her own life as a mother of a four year old boy with autism. The night featured several inspiring speakers including Beth Bostic who called the Federation a “One stop shopping center” for information and said that she “literally can’t imagine what life would have been like without the Federation” because she was helped at every step along the way. Actors Marianne and Chris Cooper shared a story of their battle to get their son Jesse a free and appropriate public education. “Parent to Parent organizations are always the strongest because you know you are going to fight for your kids and you’re going to fight for everybody else’s kids.”

Attorneys Dianne Phillips and Tere Ramos were honored for their pioneering legal work assuring that families that were English Language Learners were able to access and fully participate in the IEP process.

The gala is an annual tradition and our most important fundraiser. This has been an extraordinary year full of challenges and changes for all of us. We are grateful for your support during these difficult times. We raised nearly $200,000 during the evening including our very first $30,000 Match Opportunity! All money raised will benefit our organization and the families that we serve across Massachusetts. Thank you for your support!

“Parent to Parent organizations are always the strongest because you know you are going to fight for your kids and you’re going to fight for everybody else’s kids.”
SEPAC Summer School

By Leslie M. Leslie

A casual comment in a spring staff meeting led to the launch of SEPAC Summer School this past July. Originally conceived to help new SEPAC officers learn about their role in leading a SEPAC, an open call for “students” brought parents from all over the state. We had both SEPAC officers and parent members wanting to learn how to support their local SEPAC – and a collaborative school was born.

In early summer, we were just still adjusting to our new environment and virtual learning. So, it was surprising to have more than 135 parents sign up for summer school in the first week and over 75 attend the first session on Role of the SEPAC. Our Zoom sessions had a 20-30 minute “class” followed by breakout room discussions and sharing. Each week had a different topic and homework to review. And people came prepared with questions, often carrying the conversation past our one-hour session. For some, attending a live class each Tuesday evening was impractical, but they followed us by watching the recorded sessions on the FCSN YouTube channel and joined when they could. For others, the remote access was perfect, allowing a parent from both Nantucket and Pittsfield to join each week. A website was created and the class agenda, PowerPoint handouts, and link to the videos gave access to everyone.

https://fcsn.org/masspac/home/sepac-summer-school/

The summer flew by, and soon it was time for evaluations and goodbyes. Attendees loved the live classes and networking. They will use the information to volunteer for the SEPAC, strengthen their SEPAC, and improve communication within their community. People wanted more time and the ability to connect with other parents in their region, great ideas for next year. All students who completed the evaluation form had their SEPAC enrolled in a raffle to win a free FCSN workshop. Stay tuned for the SEPAC Snow Series this winter!

Making A Difference Conference

But, for the safety and protection of attendees and staff, we are going virtual this year! And we could not be more excited about it! As much as we are going to miss seeing all of you in person, this new format will allow more people throughout the state to take part in the event. No more worrying about the weather (yes, that dreaded early morning snow fall)! No more dealing with the traffic to get to Marlboro!

What it does allow is for us to provide you with great presenters, offering keynotes and workshops that will challenge you to think about how we work with our youth in new and innovative ways. I am so thrilled to announce that this year’s keynote is the famous Dr. Ross Greene, author of The Explosive Child, Lost in School, Lost and Found, and Raising Human Beings, as well founder of the Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS), the non-punitive, non-adversarial, trauma-informed model of care. Visit our Conference Website more information. We also have 12 amazing workshops throughout the day. And you don’t even have to get dressed up to attend them.

Registration is now open! As always, registration is free for SESPs and Foster/Adoptive/Kinship Caregivers. Just reach out to us at rtsc@fcsn.org to get your registration code. And don’t forget to download the Attendify app, to take advantage of all the day’s activities!

Just reach out to us at rtsc@fcsn.org to get your registration code.

Don’t wait to register for this exciting event! It will not disappoint! We look forward to seeing you all soon!
Equitable Services Plan

What are Equitable Services?

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), public schools must spend a portion of their federal special education funds on children with special needs who are home-schooled in the school district. To qualify, your child must have a disability that falls under the categories listed in federal or state law.

What should you do?

If you suspect your child has a learning disability and he/she does not have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), send a letter to your local public school district explaining what you suspect and ask for an evaluation to find out whether your child has a disability. This will result in the school district sending you a Consent to Evaluate Form in 5 school/workdays. Once you sign and return that form, the school will evaluate your child in 30 school/workdays and hold a team meeting to discuss the evaluation findings in 45 school/workdays from the date the school received your Consent to Evaluate Form. This may take a bit longer because of the pandemic but do not let it go on too long. The process is supposed to take a quarter of the school year. Keep in mind a whole school year can slip way if you are not attentive.

Once you have the evaluation(s) or if your child already has an IEP, let the school district know you want to be considered for an equitable services plan, as well as an IEP. If your child also receives an equitable services plan, the services can be similar, and it can offer additional services. There are some differences as well. For example, transportation to the services is allowable under an equitable serviced plan, whereas this is typically not provided under an IEP.

Your child may be eligible for an equitable services plan, in addition to the services he/she is receiving under an (IEP) if he/she is home-schooled or privately-placed by the parents in a secular or non-secular independent school located in the school district.

For more information contact our Information Center (see www.fcsn.org for the intake form or call 617 236-7210).

The Federation will offer workshops on this topic soon.
Pathways for Parents
Program Spotlight:

The Pathways for Parents Program at FCSN works with programs that are funded through the Family and Community Engagement Team at Department of Children & Families. We will spotlight these programs in coming issues of Newsline. Two programs that Pathways supports work with kinship caregivers, who serve as foster parents for relatives.

The Massachusetts Commission on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren works to provide information, resources, and support to grandparents and relative caregivers throughout Massachusetts.

The Commission is a board of volunteers with one Director. Pre-Covid-19, The Commission held community workshops throughout the Commonwealth each Fall and Spring and would invite a speaker, such as someone from the Federation, to present to grandparent and community providers.

Each workshop also featured a resource panel of service providers, both state and local, to share much needed resources with participants. In light of the current pandemic, workshops have been moved to virtual workshops this fall. Workshop topics have included “Setting Boundaries with Loved Ones” and “Providing for Your Grandchild’s Future.” The Commission is proud to work with and support the over 50 support groups for grandparents across the state. We provide trainings and monthly meetings for facilitators. The Commission’s largest event is an annual conference of over 200 people, however, this did not occur in 2020 due to the pandemic. Lastly, The Commission has an up to date website, sends monthly newsletters, and provides one on one support to grandparents raising grandchildren, relative caregivers, and service providers.

In addition to workshops, the Commission does legislative and policy advocacy on behalf of grandparents and relative caregivers, including filing legislation and improving services within state agencies. Learn more about the Commission on Grandparents Raising Grandchildren at http://www.massgrg.com

The Kinship Navigator program assists all familial caregivers including kinship foster parents caring for children involved with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), kinship caregivers involved in the Probate and Family Court, and families with informal care arrangements. The Kinship Navigator program provides support, guidance, tips and assistance for these families. The Pathways program supports the Kinship Navigator with information, training and direct support to families around special education.

The Kinship Navigator program helps families navigate services such as applying for benefits from the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and connects families with community supports including the Family Resource Centers (https://www.frcma.org), mental health and counseling, legal services, childcare, food assistance, and support groups for caregivers.

You can learn more about the Kinship Navigator program at: https://www.mass.gov/info-details/kinship-navigator-information.

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The Federation has always been a great partner to the Commission. Earlier this fall, the Eileen Sandberg from the Federation hosted two virtual workshops on “Re-Entry and Regression” to prepare grandparents and relative caregivers for what school and learning may look like in this current environment.

Colleen Pritoni, director of the Commission
Tips for Successful Remote Therapy Sessions

It is Fall, school has begun, and students are receiving related services as part of their IEP. (i.e. PT, OT, SLT, ABA). For some students, these services will be in-person, but for others they will continue through the remote telehealth model. Telehealth delivery of therapies requires parents and providers to adapt. Parents, who may not have observed or participated in their child’s services at school are now an integral part.

Communication and preparation are essential to successful remote sessions. Parents should discuss the space requirements and equipment your child will need. For example, are there specific devices, technology, or communication aides needed for speech sessions? Some schools are providing therapy boxes for students with basic equipment for PT and OT sessions; will your district provide anything? Parents can problem solve with the therapist to identify items within your home to use.

Parents may need to play an active role at home to support their child during a remote session. Discuss the goal and treatment plan with the therapist. Identify limitations in your ability to participate in these sessions. You may have work constraints or physical limitations of your own. Also, provide feedback to the therapist about your child’s success and challenges with these sessions. Communication, collaboration and some imagination are key to planning and delivering successful sessions.

Some Resources:
This checklist was developed for early intervention programs, but can be used for any PT, OT, SLT, ABA session, https://ecpcta.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2810/2020/03/Tips-for-Families-Remote-Home-Visit-Flyer-pg2.pdf.

This is guidance from pediatricians describing what telehealth is and can be, how to prepare and what standards you should expect, https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/health-management/Pages/Telehealth-Services-for-Children.aspx.

Adapting to Change: Family Engagement

We are adapting to change in every part of life right now – masks, economic troubles, illness, isolation. Changes in schools are among the most disruptive. While these changes in schools have caused discomfort and grief, they also provide new opportunities for family engagement. The necessity of re-thinking schools gives us an opportunity to improve the relationships between schools and families.

“Rarely is the topic of parent engagement at the top of the ‘to do’ list for education administrators and educators. But the coronavirus pandemic has put the topic of engagement with parents and families at the center of today’s education debates, and education leaders across the globe are finding out just what powerful allies parents can be in their children’s learning—including parents from the most marginalized communities.” -The Brookings Institute

In some Massachusetts school communities, we see a new level of interaction and familiarity between families and teachers. We are inspired by caregivers who are communicating with teachers about how their children are handling remote learning and reshuffling their lives to support their children’s learning while balancing multiple obligations. Educators are pouring endless hours into phone calls, porch visits, and video conferences with children and families. We see school districts hiring additional staff and implementing processes for supporting families’ needs for food, technology, and other necessities. These enhanced partnerships will continue to support children’s learning and their overall wellbeing.

Recently there was on a panel where we discussed how Statewide Family Engagement Centers like ours have reacted to the challenges of supporting family engagement during a pandemic. COVID-19 caused us to pivot our work from in-person to virtual and focus recentering equity and the overall wellness of our team and communities. We talked about our virtual family support groups, school reopening resources, support for educators, virtual training, and technical assistance we provide to schools and districts. We also discussed the many improved family engagement practices we see emerging. I left the session feeling hopeful that even though the work being done now is in response to crisis, these expanded family engagement practices can continue, and relationships built with families can be sustained long term.
Transition from Early Intervention to Preschool in COVID Times

The Federation is helping to disseminate this event. MORE Advertising and Cambridge Focus are doing research for several agencies in MA and are recruiting parents of children age 3 to ~5 for virtual focus groups to discuss transitioning out of Early Intervention Services. They are looking for important feedback from families in Massachusetts! Participants will be paid for their time! Anyone interested can contact the phone number below to see if they qualify!

Who is eligible?
Parents with kids age 3~5 who previously received Early Intervention services and were found ineligible OR eligible for pre-school special education services. We’re looking for families who have gone through this transition already.

What is involved?
• Participate in a virtual Zoom focus group discussion in English; total of 80 minutes
• Dates are Nov. 5th, 9th, or 10th – Specific date will be shared with those recruited
• Parents receive $100 for participating!

How can parents sign up? One of two ways:
• Complete an online screener and a recruiter will contact them – Quick Online Screener
• Call Karissa at (857)-331-1357 if you’re interested and reference, “transition groups”

Thank you for helping us to better serve families!

Take part in an online focus group!

Is your child age 3 - 5
We’re looking for research participants!
You will receive a stipend for your time. To see if you qualify, call Karissa (857) 331-1357 or complete a short online survey using the link below.

Did they receive Early Intervention services in the last 2.5 years?

*Participation by invitation only. Please call for more information.
# FCSN CALENDAR & ACTIVITIES

## November 2020

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<td>2 Mindful Mondays 7-8PM</td>
<td>3 MassPAC Office Hours 7-8PM</td>
<td>4 RTSC Online Orientation Training 4:00PM-6:00PM</td>
<td>Understanding the IEP in Portuguese in collaboration with Embrace Pathways 6:00-8:00 pm</td>
<td>FCSN Chat 5-6PM Charla with Spanish Speaking Parents 5:00-6:00PM</td>
<td>7 Support Group for Spanish speaking parents with Boston Children’s Hospital 4:30-6:00PM</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>9 Mindful Mondays 7-8PM</td>
<td>10 RTSC Online Orientation Training 5:00PM-7:00PM</td>
<td>11 Basic Rights: Transition Planning MassPAC at North Middlesex SEPAC 6:30-8:30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13 Support Group for Spanish speaking parents with Boston Children’s Hospital 4:30-6:00 pm</td>
<td>14 Effective Communication in Portuguese in collaboration with Embrace Pathways 6:00-8:00 pm</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>16 Mindful Mondays 7-8PM</td>
<td>17 MassPAC Office Hours 7-8 PM</td>
<td>18 RTSC Making a Difference Conference 8:00AM-4:00PM</td>
<td>19 MassPAC/FCSN at Boston Public School Virtual Resource Fair 6:30-8:30PM Networking Series: RTSC,PCTI&amp; MassPAC 10:30AM-12:30PM</td>
<td>20 Support Group for Spanish speaking parents with Boston Children's Hospital 4:30-6:00 pm</td>
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<td>8 MassPAC presentation/Overview of FCSN Resources for Mansfield SEPAC 6:30-8:00 PM</td>
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<td>10 Support Group for Spanish speaking parents with Boston Children's Hospital</td>
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**Step Up for Families!**

**Donate Now!**

From our volunteer-staffed Information Center to our annual Visions of Community Conference, your generous support helps inform, educate and empower families with the information they need to ensure better outcomes for their children. To make a gift online visit: [FCSN.org/donate](http://FCSN.org/donate). Any gift, whether large or small, is important. If you would like to make a contribution by mail, please make your check payable to FCSN and send to:

The Schrafft Center  
529 Main Street, Suite 1M3  
Boston, MA, 01209