FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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INFORMING, EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING FAMILIES

FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

BACK TO SCHOOL

BY PAM NOURSE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Recently, I received an email from the SPAN parent advocacy network, our partner parent center in New Jersey, with the subject, "when you are a parent, you are a leader"! The email went on to say:

> "Being a parent requires ongoing commitment, engagement, integrity, and a vision for a better future with opportunities for all. Parents know what matters the most and make critical decisions to achieve goals for their children and families. Parents build trust and forge relationships with others, and they are always thinking about new ways to overcome challenges and develop better solutions. Essential qualities, knowledge, and expertise that go into being a parent also describe effective leaders. When you are a parent, you are indeed a leader!"

I was struck by how true this is, particularly as we are about to begin our second school year during a pandemic. Parents have lots of difficult decisions to make about what is best for their children. It often takes extraordinary leadership to do the best for our children, especially during times of uncertainty.

A parent leader may be a parent, grandparent, relative, guardian, foster parent, or anyone else who may be in a parenting role. Parent leaders are strong advocates for themselves, their children, their families, and other families in their community. Parent leaders founded the Federation, and recognizing, identifying, developing, and empowering parent leadership remains core to our mission. Please see https://fcsn.org/leadership-for-parents-families/ for leadership opportunities offered by the Federation.

Remember, When you are a parent, you are a leader!

Yours,

Pam

FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

BACK TO SCHOOL, IT TAKES PRACTICE!

BY LESLIE LESLIE, MassPAC PROJECT DIRECTOR

The 2021-2022 school year was unlike any other our students and families have experienced before. The challenge now is taking the lessons learned and help our students prepare for the new school year.

Lessons learned:
·Students showed tremendous flexibility and learned new methods of participation, increasing their skills and knowledge
·Online learning environments were a good fit for some students' learning styles
·We need to take care of mental health before we can expect students to achieve academically
·Family engagement is vital to keep up-to-date on changing dynamics

Planning for a Successful start:
·Going back in person will require planning and preparing, for example, getting up earlier and packing for the day. Checklists can help to remember essential items
·Follow school emails to be aware of any changes
·Encourage students to ask for help, it's OK not to be OK, and some educators can help
·Plan on attending back to school events or open houses
·Students should explore opportunities to get involved in school clubs or extracurricular activities

Last year, students learned new things about themselves and learning. Although many felt anxious about returning to a "new normal," they continued to navigate new classes, stay organized, and interact with peers. Some students may lost social skills and learning loss, yet families remained involved, tracked progress, and kept an open line of communication with their student's educators. This year will continue to put those new skills into practice while supporting our children.

The US DOE released a Return to School Roadmap (https://sites.ed.gov/roadmap/), providing essential resources and support for students, parents, educators, and school communities to build excitement and confidence in returning to classrooms this school year. The Roadmap outlines how federal funding can support the safe and sustained return to in person learning. Families can ask about options to participate in local forums which focus on how the DOE intends to spend these new federal funds.

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BACK TO SCHOOL WITH COVID-19

BY RUTH M. DIAZ, PARENT TRAINING AND INFORMATION CENTER PROJECT DIRECTOR AND PAT NEMIA, MASS FAMILY VOICES/F2F PROJECT DIRECTOR

Here we are again, starting another school year dealing with the uncertainties of COVID-19. Over the last few months, MA has experienced an unfortunate surge of new cases caused by the highly contagious Delta variant. This spike has changed parts of the back to school plan for the fall.

While vaccination is a personal choice, the recommendation by all trusted partners is that people should be vaccinated. While Massachusetts has done well with its vaccine rate, more people need to be vaccinated to stop the spread of the Delta variant and prevent the development of new variants.

Vaccines took an important step this summer. After collecting data and many months of studies, the U.S. Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) fully approved the Pfizer vaccine on August 21, 2021. More than 165 million people received a COVID-19 vaccine that showed how safe and effective the vaccines are in protecting people, how well they work to prevent severe coronavirus disease, and how safely and consistently the vaccines are manufactured. Over the next few months, approval for the Moderna and Johnson and Johnson vaccines should be conducted. Families should know that full FDA approval can result in local governments, organizations, and businesses requiring all eligible individuals to get vaccinated to participate in regular activities or special events.

What will all this mean for your child's return to school?

Click on FAQs, latest guidance from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for the new guidance and updated current guidance, information and more. Click here for the translated FAQs and letter.

COVID-19 is not behind us yet. Experts agree that the best way to prevent the rapid spread of the Delta variant and prevent other variants from developing is to get vaccinated ourselves and encouraging our friends and family to do the same. We can set a good example by wearing our masks indoors whenever possible and washing our hands often.

If you have any concerns about your child, please contact our information center at (800) 331-0688 or https://fcsn.org/fcsn-intake-form/.

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FAMILY CONNECTION SERIES

FCSN MONTHLY SERIES – EVERY SECOND THURSDAY

Connecting you to agency leaders.

Meet with the leaders from state agencies; and ask questions, learn more about what is happening and stay connected to other families.

REGISTRATION COMING SOON

JOIN US!

FAMILY CONNECTIONS
with
Russell Johnston, Ph.D.,
Senior Commissioner of DESE

10.07.2021
5:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Location: Register Online
Date: Thursday - October 7th, 2021
Time: 5:00 PM - 6:00 PM

Presenter: Russell Johnston, Ph.D., Senior Commissioner, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Topic: Join us for the opportunity to ask questions related to special education in Massachusetts.

Please complete the registration form and submit any questions or Translation needs prior to the webinar Translation provided as needed.

www.fcsn.org
617-236-7210 or 800-331-0688

For more information regarding FAMILY CONNECTIONS or to submit you questions contact Pat Nemia at pnemia@fcsn.org.

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LET'S TRY SOMETHING NEW

BY ROSALIE RIPPEY, PROJECT MANAGER - SECONDARY OPTIONS FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

This "Back to School" season is unlike any before. On top of the typical nervous excitement of a new school year, the stress and trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take its toll. At the same time, we see many more eyes opening to the ongoing legacy and impact of racism on communities, families, and children. So, how do we approach a new school year after all that has transpired?

Family engagement researchers Karen L. Mapp and Eyal Bergman offer some compelling answers. In Embracing a New Normal: Toward a More Liberatory Approach to Family Engagement, they write:

"With this report, we are issuing a... Call to Action: for the PreK–12 sector to walk through the door opened by COVID-19 and the anti-racist movement and address the often-ignored and unspoken dynamics that prevent the cultivation of effective partnerships between families and educators...
The "new normal" must be built on anti-racist and social justice principles. Families from all backgrounds must be seen and celebrated as 'the geniuses that they are,' in the words of Shantae Toole, cofounder, and codirector of First Teacher in Boston. They must be embraced by educators as equal partners and recognized as experts on their children and communities."

The Federation was founded by activist parents whose expertise was routinely dismissed by educational institutions. Today, the Federation invests deeply in multi-lingual and anti-racist approaches to supporting parent advocacy and leadership while working collaboratively with school districts and agencies to strengthen their collaborative relationships with families.

I hope you will join me in reflecting on the many ways our work can be transformed positively through partnerships with diverse families. Mapp and Bergman advise us to ask ourselves these questions:

- Am I seeking input from, and do I listen to and value, what all families have to say? (Respect)
- Am I demonstrating to all families that I am competent and that I see them as competent and valuable caretakers? (Competence)
- Do I keep my word with families? (Integrity)
- Do I show families that I value and care about them as people? (Personal Regard)

Friends, it's a new school year; let's try something new—something more equitable and liberatory–together.

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NEW PTIC WORKSHOP – "BULLYING, WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW."

BY RUTH M. DIAZ, PTIC PROJECT DIRECTOR

The Parent Training and Information Center is rolling out a new workshop while we prepare to return in-person to school. It is entitled "Bullying, What Parents Need to Know." The workshop is also appropriate for professionals.

The workshop learning objectives are to understand:

1. What bully is;
2. The school's legal obligation to prevent and address bullying;
3. Some strategies and tools for dealing with bullying; and
4. How to address bullying in the IEP

If a group or organization has ten or more people interested in attending this workshop, the workshop fee can be waived.

Request a workshop at:
https://fcsn.org/ptic/workshops/request.

For more information on this workshop, feel free to reach out to Sara Nino at snino@fcsn.org.

CALL US TODAY

HAVE A QUESTION?

WE WILL HELP YOU FIND SOME ANSWERS.

617 236-7210 (MAIN OFFICE)
800 331-0688 (STATEWIDE)

YOU MAY ALSO SUBMIT AN INTAKE FORM.

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REAL TRANSITION PARTNERS LUNCHTIME LEARNING

Mental Health & Employment

Youth/young adults with mental health challenges sometimes struggle to find and keep employment.

Join us to hear from a young man who will share his personal experience and why it's important to:

- Normalize mental health and realize everyone can work.
- Support young adults and avoid common pitfalls.
- Help youth/young adults identify and learn skills to move forward.

Michael Scanlon
Youth Coordinator
CT Parent Advocacy Center

Join us:
September 23, 2021
12:00 - 1:00
Click to Register

REAL
REACH. ACCESS. LINK.
Transition Partners

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Questions contact: Dawn Monaco, dmonaco@spanadvocacy.org

ALL THINGS TRANSITION

BY REBECCA DAVIS, TRANSITION PROJECT MANAGER

We are delighted that Jacob Rivas will be joining the Federation as Transition Support Coordinator.

Jacob is from New Jersey and graduated from Oberlin College. He brings years of experience working within the disability community and particularly enjoys helping families and self-advocates navigate service systems.

Most recently, Jacob was a Services Coordinator at United Cerebral Palsy. He also served as a Program Coordinator for young adults through the Jewish Family & Children Service. As Transition Support Coordinator, Jacob will coordinate with MRC offices to provide support, information, and training to parents of youth with disabilities, self-advocates, and professional partners. Jacob's creative skills and skilled musician and web designer will be a welcome addition to our team as the Federation explores new ways to engage transition-aged youth with disabilities.

Jacob's enthusiasm and sincere desire to help others is evident in his work, as our families and
partners at MRC will soon learn!

For more information on REAL Transition at the Federation contact Jacob Rivas at jrivas@fcsn.org.

CALL US TODAY

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BECOME A MASSPAC MEMBER

BY LESLIE LESLIE, MASSPAC PROJECT DIRECTOR

Start the school year right – with membership in MassPAC!

A District/SEPAC MassPAC membership includes a free FCSN Basic Rights workshop and three free registrations for our Visions of Community Conference for a SEPAC parent, a district educator, and a youth (age 14+). Coupled with technical assistance, invitations to our Networking Series of workshops, FCSN webinars, and Regional SEPAC meetings, what's not to love?

Join today - https://fcsn.org/masspac/masspac-membership-application/

For more information regarding SEPACs or to become a MassPAC member contact Leslie Leslie at lleslie@fcsn.org.

FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

WELCOME TO COMMISSIONER OPE OF THE MA COMMISSION FOR THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

FROM ALL OF US AT THE FEDERATION

We are so pleased to welcome Commissioner Ope who joined the MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in March 2021. We are committed to working with Commissioner Ope and his team to support families of children who are deaf and hard of hearing.

Below is the announcement of Commissioner's appointment.

"BOSTON - Today, the Baker-Polito Administration announced the appointment of Dr. Opeoluwa Sotonwa as Commissioner for the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH), effective March 1, 2021. Dr. Sotonwa brings over 20 years' experience as a lawyer, advocate, and accomplished public official who has improved access, accommodations, and quality of life for individuals who are Deaf, Late Deafened, Hard of Hearing and Deafblind. He is fluent in English, American Sign Language (ASL), Nigerian Sign Language, and Yoruba (Nigerian).

Most recently, Dr. Sotonwa has served as Executive Director for the Missouri Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Earlier in his career, he was the information and advocacy programs coordinator at the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Dr. Sotonwa's work on the national level includes the National Black Deaf Advocates where he was vice president and then a member of the board, and he currently serves on the board with Telecommunication for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Inc (TDI).

"Since embarking on a search for MCDHH's new Commissioner in the fall of 2020, we have focused on hiring a leader who is grounded in the issues important to the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, who understands the diverse needs of the community and promotes a culture of inclusion. Dr. Sotonwa is the right person at this time to lead the Commission," said Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders. "He is an accomplished leader who will connect positively with staff, constituents, and the broader community. I am grateful to Acting Commissioner Ford for providing the interim leadership and will ensure a smooth transition. I deeply appreciate the engagement, advice, and support from the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community. I look forward to welcoming Dr. Sotonwa to this position during the celebration of the agency's 35th commemoration.""

Read more...

FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

ANNOUNCING ACCESS FOR FAMILIES WHO SPEAK LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH

By PAT CAMERON, DIRECTOR OF Family TIES

The Federation is pleased to announce we have acquired the use of a language line to help us provide needed services for families and professionals who speak a language other than English. In addition to our staff who speak Spanish, Haitian Creole, French, Mandarin, Cantonese, Portuguese, and Russian, we realized the need to contract with an organization that can connect us to all the languages spoken here in Massachusetts. With the language line, we can access 250 languages! We have changed our incoming phone message to reflect not only the languages our staff speak but now have access to a language line which can provide translation and join on 3 party calls with a family.

Please spread the word that we have increased our capacity to serve diverse families!

Contact our information center at 1 (800) 331-0688 or 617-236-7210.

THE CHILD TAX CREDIT IS HERE TO HELP FAMILIES!

BY PAT NEMIA, MASS FAMILY VOICES PROJECT DIRECTOR

In 2021, the American Rescue Plan increased the Child Tax Credit from $2,000 per child to $3,000 per child for children over the age of six and from $2,000 to $3,600 for children under the age of six, and raised the age limit from 16 to 17. All working families will get the full credit if they make up to $150,000 for a couple or $112,500 for a family with a single parent. A qualifying child is under the age of 18 at the end of 2021 and has a valid Social Security number.

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CON'T THE CHILD TAX CREDIT IS HERE TO HELP FAMILIES!

BY PAT NEMIA, MASS FAMILY VOICES PROJECT DIRECTOR

If you've filed tax returns for 2019 or 2020, or if you signed up with the Non-Filer tool last year to receive a stimulus check from the Internal Revenue Service, you will get the monthly Child Tax Credit automatically.

If you have not filed taxes, you may complete a non-filer form to apply for the credit: https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/child-tax-credit-non-filer-sign-up-tool.

These are some resources to explain the Child Tax Credit.
Resources for different language groups:
Chinese:
https://www.mass.gov/doc/masazhusaizhoudeertongshuishoudimian-child-tax-credit-in-massachusetts-chinese/download
https://www.irs.gov/zh-hant/credits-deductions/advance-child-tax-credit-payments-in-2021 (Traditional)
https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5538sp.pdf
https://www.irs.gov/zh-hans/credits-deductions/2021-child-tax-credit-and-advance-child-tax-credit-payments-topic-a-general-information
https://www.irs.gov/zh-hans/credits-deductions/2021-child-tax-credit-and-advance-child-tax-credit-payments-topic-a-general-information
https://www.bostontaxhelp.org/child-tax-credit-helpful-information/simplified-chinese/ (Simplified Chinese)
https://www.bostontaxhelp.org/child-tax-credit-helpful-information/traditional-chinese/ (Traditional Chinese)

English:
https://www.mass.gov/doc/child-tax-credit-faq/download
https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/advance-child-tax-credit-payments-in-2021

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CON'T THE CHILD TAX CREDIT IS HERE TO HELP FAMILIES!

BY PAT NEMIA, MASS FAMILY VOICES PROJECT DIRECTOR

English con't:

https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5538.pdf
https://www.whitehouse.gov/child-tax-credit/
https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/2021-child-tax-credit-and-advance-child-tax-credit-payments-topic-a-general-information

Haitian- Creole:

https://www.irs.gov/ht/credits-deductions/advance-child-tax-credit-payments-in-2021
https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5538ht.pdf
https://www.bostontaxhelp.org/child-tax-credit-helpful-information/enfomasyon-ki-itil-sou-kredi-pou-taks-pou-timoun-haitian-creole/

Portuguese:

https://www.mass.gov/doc/child-tax-credit-faq-portuguese/download
https://www.bostontaxhelp.org/child-tax-credit-helpful-information/brazilian-portuguese/

Spanish:

https://www.mass.gov/doc/child-tax-credit-faq-spanish/download
https://www.whitehouse.gov/es/el-credito-tributario-por-hijos/
https://www.irs.gov/es/credits-deductions/advance-child-tax-credit-payments-in-2021
https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5538sp.pdf
https://www.irs.gov/es/credits-deductions/2021-child-tax-credit-and-advance-child-tax-credit-payments-topic-a-general-information

Vietnamese:

https://www.irs.gov/vi/credits-deductions/advance-child-tax-credit-payments-in-2021
https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5538vie.pdf

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Vietnamese con't:
https://www.irs.gov/vi/credits-deductions/2021-child-tax-credit-and-advance-child-tax-credit-payments-topic-a-general-information

Other languages:
Korean:
https://www.irs.gov/ko/credits-deductions/advance-child-tax-credit-payments-in-2021
https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5538ko.pdf

Russian:
https://www.irs.gov/ru/credits-deductions/advance-child-tax-credit-payments-in-2021
https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p5538ru.pdf

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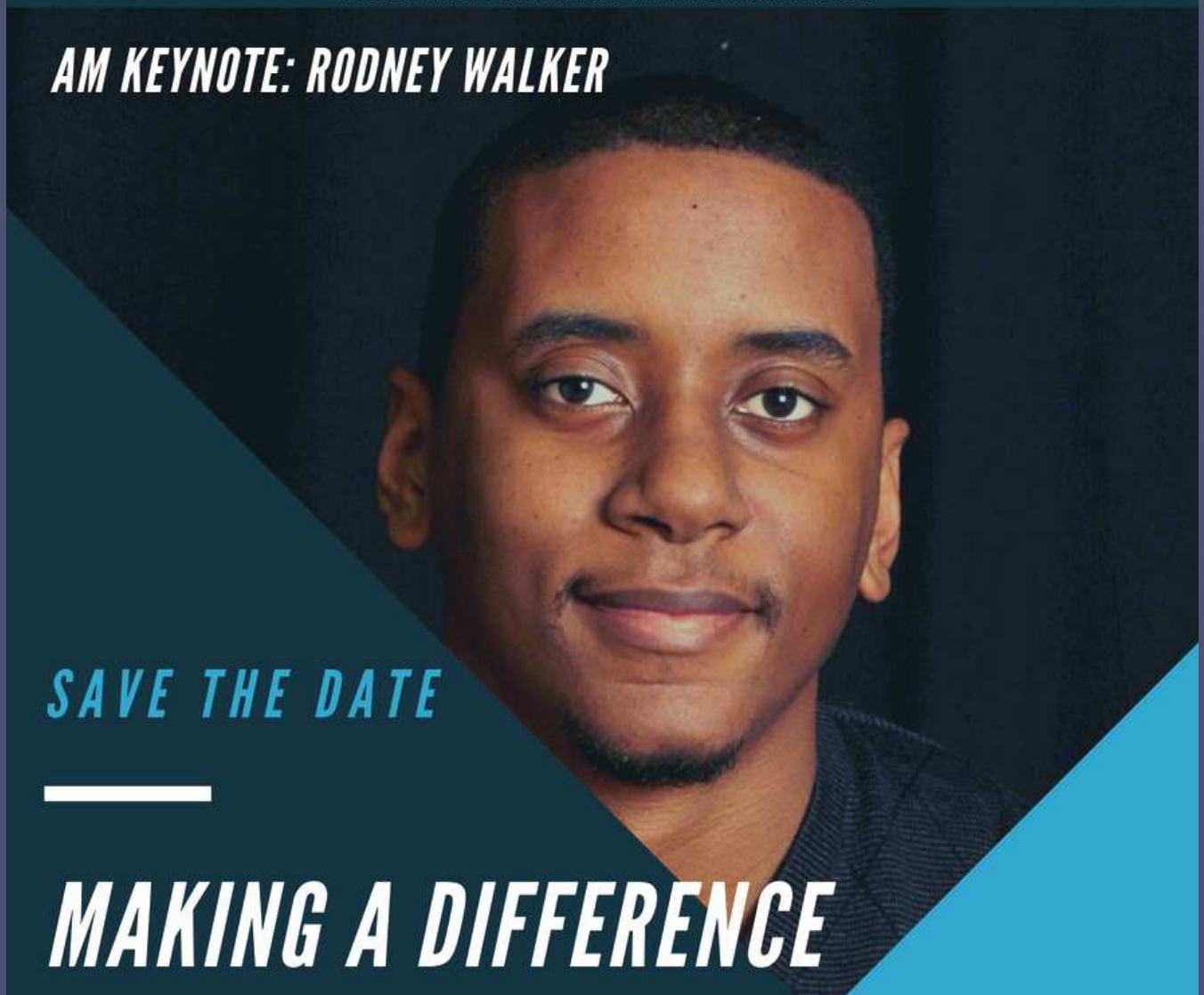
AM KEYNOTE: RODNEY WALKER



SAVE THE DATE

MAKING A DIFFERENCE CONFERENCE 2021

November 16, 2021

REGISTERATION OPENS SOON

PM Keynote: Nancy Rappaport

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Matthew Trivella
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FOR MORE INFORMATION

CONTACT MARY LEWIS-PIERCE

MPIERCE@FCSN.ORG

WWW.FCSN.ORG/GALA2021