

2017 Special Education Committee Training

Becoming a volunteer parent advocate/special education representative for the PTA -

WHAT IS THE MCCPTA SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE and WHAT IS A SPECIAL EDUCATION CHAIRPERSON?

MCCPTA: What does the acronym stand for/what does the organization stand for?

OVERVIEW:

The MCCPTA Special Education Committee consists of Special Education Chairpersons and/or Co-Chairpersons in schools across the county, and is led by a Special Education Executive Committee.

We work as a countywide organization representing the concerns of families of children with special needs. We share our experiences, we provide support, and we advocate for all children, no matter what their ability. We want all children to realize their maximum potential and become the very best they can be as students and citizens.

SPECIAL EDUCATION CHAIRPERSONS - Within our schools, we provide information and support to our school communities to reinforce a positive parent-school partnership necessary to ensure a free and appropriate public education for every student.

**SHARING OUT – Our Stories**

**ARE YOU QUALIFIED TO SERVE?**

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JOB POSTING

**MCCPTA SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

**Wanted: PT(S)A Volunteersforeach school – persons who are committed to helping their special needs community**

**Qualifications: Must be compassionate and caring**

**Salary: None**

**Benefits: Too many to list**

**Bonus: Making a difference in the lives of others**

**Hours: Flexible**

**Contact: Jeanne Taylor, MCCPTA Special Education Chair, frtjmt@yahoo.com**

**Since it is estimated that 10-12% of the population has some type of disability, it is imperative that we provide advocacy efforts to MCPS families who fall into this category. Children in MCPS receive a myriad of special education services in a variety of settings. For example, some students receive services in the general education classroom with support from special education staff, some receive small group instruction, some receive services in self-contained classes, and so on.**

**As such, the MCCPTA Special Education Committee would like to have a PT(S)A Special Education Committee representative at every school in Montgomery County. Please consider passing this notice on to everyone you know who cares about special needs children and their families.**

***Just a few examples of how our committee has made a real impact in the past:***

**Helped resolve special education transportation issues for individual students – reducing unacceptable ride times for young children**

**Assisted families at IEP meetings**

**Educated school officials about the campaign to eradicate use of the “R” word**

**Honored students, parents, staff & programs that contribute to the success and acceptance of special education students in MCPS**

**Testified before elected officials about special education issues/legislation**

**Shared information on issues facing special education students:**

**From many years of experience with my own children, I am aware of three common areas that affect some students' ability to succeed in the classroom.**

**First of all, it's important to remember that most children do not wake up in the morning thinking, "How can I act up so that everyone hates me?" Just like adults, there are usually real challenges like -**

**Attention Issues: Many students can be reminded to re-focus by gently tapping their table, or getting their attention in some other way that does not involved reprimanding them in front of the entire class. In elementary school, one of the common mistakes that educators make is to take away recess from students who have a hard time staying still. That is not helpful - studies have shown that exercise re-engages the brain, making it available for learning. My former neighbor taught a student who had attention issues and Tourette's syndrome. When he got antsy he would give her a signal and she knew that he needed to go in the hall and do a few jumping jacks. It really helped him get back on task. Other strategies are to give those busy students a task to help with in the classroom.**

**Sensory Issues: Many students have problems integrating their senses. Sensory processing is a term that refers to the way the nervous system receives messages from the senses and turns them into appropriate motor and behavioral responses. Issues occur when sensory signals don't get organized into appropriate responses. For example, if my younger son is trying to watch a video in class, he cannot tune out distractions. If another student is being disruptive by talking, he gets upset. When he complains to the teacher, the teacher tells him to "just ignore" the other student. When someone has both attention and sensory issues, this is asking for the impossible. Since he doesn't get relief from the distraction, he ends up lashing out at the other student and getting into trouble. The best remedy in this case is to separate the students.**

**Anxiety Issues: In some students, anxiety is masked as annoying behaviors. Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress. Sometimes it can be positive, i.e. if it helps the student study harder for an exam, handle a new situation, or stay focused on an important task. In general, it helps people cope. But when anxiety becomes excessive, it can get in the way of learning and getting along with others. To use my older son as an example, there are times when he is very negative and difficult to be around. Before we came to understand the cause, we thought he was just being oppositional and behaving badly. After close questioning we came to realize that the cause of his unhappiness is anxiety. Many years ago we drove through an area Festival of Lights for the holidays. My son complained bitterly during the entire outing. My husband was finally able to pin down just what was going on. Because we had started out on the trip later than expected, he was afraid that he was going to fall asleep and miss the show.**

**A few years ago, I observed another student in math class who constantly asked the teacher the same questions over and over again, particularly when it came to testing related information. He wasn't trying to be annoying - he just needed reassurance that there would be adequate time to review the material. Once he was reassured, the student was able to move on.**

**I just wanted to share our experiences in the hope that it may benefit some students and staff. Please let me know if you have any questions.**

**\*Disclaimer: I am not a doctor, nor do I play one on TV!**

**WHAT IS THE MCCPTA SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE?**

**The MCCPTA Special Education Committee is a long-standing committee of the Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations. It consists of Special Education Chairpersons and/or Co-Chairpersons from schools around the county, and is led by the Special Education Executive Committee.**

**The Special Education Committee works as a countywide organization representing the broad concerns of families of children with special needs to the MCCPTA Executive Board, to the Department of Special Education, and to the Board of Education. It serves as a network of parents who share their experiences in advocating for special needs children to implement successful family-school partnerships and achieve a world-class education for children with special needs.**

**WHAT IS A SPECIAL EDUCATION CHAIRPERSON?**

**A Special Education Chairperson works within his or her school community to serve as a resource to parents, caregivers and school staff members by:**

**Helping parents understand the Special Education Process and providing support to the school community by:**

* ***Sitting on the School PTA Executive Committee or Board***
* ***Participating on the School Improvement Plan Committee, Grading and Reporting or other PTA or Countywide sponsored Committees***
* ***Informing the school community of MCPS and other related resources by:***
* ***Being available to school staff members and families***
* ***Writing PTA Newsletter Articles***
* ***Requesting funds from your school PTA to support purchases and committee work (Special Ed. Media Center materials)***
* ***Placing materials in designated areas, such as Resource Center, Bulletin Boards, e-lists***
* ***Staying abreast on news and bulletin items on various websites such as MCPS, MCCPTA, and many others.***

**And last but not least, Special Education Chairs help facilitate family-school communication**

**Some useful links:**

**Montgomery County Council of Parent Teacher Associations (MCCPTA)**

<http://www.mccpta.org/>

**MCCPTA Special Education Committee**

www.mccpta.org/special-education.html

**Montgomery County Public Schools**

<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/>

**Department of Special Education**

[**http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/special-education/parent-resources/**](http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/special-education/parent-resources/)

**Additional Information and Resources**

<http://disabilityrightsmd.org/>

Testimony sent via email

April 26, 2015

Montgomery County Board of Education

850 Hungerford Drive

Rockville, MD 20850

Re: Support for Collocation of Rock Terrace School and Tilden Middle School

Dear Members of the Board of Education,

I am writing to ask that you support the Superintendent’s recommendation to move ahead with plans to collocate Rock Terrace School and Tilden Middle School.

Given the age and condition of the Rock Terrace facility, and the upcoming revitalization/expansion project at Tilden Middle School, the proposed plan to collocate these two facilities makes good business sense.

Even more importantly, a collocation would make it easier for the students at Rock Terrace to experience inclusive opportunities with their typically developing peers. I have no doubt that these opportunities would also benefit the students at Tilden Middle School.

In order to ensure that all of the students, their families and the greater community are well served in the years to come, it will be critically important to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study and to consider adequate short and long term planning needs.

Keeping the current structure - i.e. one Principal for each school – will help each entity remain autonomous. It will be important for each administrator to have the same level of authority so that collaboration is an equitable process.

From the information currently available, it appears that the proposed plan is a win-win situation for the various stakeholders.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Taylor

Jeanne Taylor, Chair

MCCPTA Special Education Committee

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| Germantown, Maryland - March 18, 2013 - The Montgomery County Council of Parent-Teacher Associations (MCCPTA), which represents over 44,000 members who belong to 190 local PT(S)As, supports two bills recently introduced in the Maryland General Assembly. If passed, House Bill 1286 and Senate Bill 691 would rightfully assign the burden of proof in special education due process cases to local school districts.  Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), public schools are required to provide a free and appropriate public education for children with disabilities. When parents and school districts can't agree on special education services, resolution can lead to a due process hearing before an administrative law judge where the Burden of Proof is on the disputing party, most often the parents or legal guardians.    Because parents typically lack the resources, expertise, and legal skills needed to demonstrate a school district's noncompliance, MCCPTA supports placing the burden of proof in IDEA cases on the school district. Advocates for children believe that schools are in a better position to demonstrate their compliance with special education law than parents and guardians are to disprove it.  School districts know what services, staffing, modifications, accommodations and placements are available, and how different children have fared with them. School districts also hold students' educational records and employ the people, such as teachers and principals, on whom the parents must rely for testimony in hearings, or in mediation.  On April 24, 2012, MCCPTA passed a resolution urging the Montgomery County Public Schools, the Montgomery County Delegation, and the State of Maryland, to support legislation placing burden of proof on the school districts.  MCCPTA President Janette Gilman released this statement, "This is a matter of fairness and equality. As such, we hope that the Maryland General Assembly will move burden of proof legislation forward in order to help level the playing field for children with disabilities and their families who often face overwhelming challenges."  Current burden of proof legislation is also supported by the Maryland PTA (MDPTA), which includes nearly 960 units across the state. |

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| MCCPTA is an association of local PT(S)As in Montgomery County, chartered by Maryland PTA, that works with parents, students, school staff, and our community on behalf of every child. MCCPTA assists local PTAs by exchanging information and experience, serving as the primary parent interface with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), and leading advocacy efforts at the local, state, and national level. MCCPTA represents approximately 44,000 members who belong to our 190 local PT(S)As, accounting for better than one in four PTA members in the State of Maryland.  **What Does it Take to be an Effective Advocate?** *by Lisa Simmons*  *For more articles like this visit* [*http://www.bridges4kids.org*](http://www.bridges4kids.org/)*.*    Most advocates become advocates not because they feel they have natural talents that would make them a good advocate, but because they are "drafted".  When your child, your student, or someone you care about is not being treated fairly you simply can't look the other way -- SOMEONE has to be their voice.  If you are one of these "drafted" advocates, don't despair. You can still be an extremely effective advocate. Let's take a quick look at the key ingredients to effective advocacy:  **1. Focus on the Individual with Special Needs**  An effective advocate is focused on what is truly important, the individual you are advocating for. It's not about "winning" the power struggle, it's not about "showing off" all the laws you've learned, and it's not about "punishing" the people you feel have let you or your child down. Are you focused on the needs of the person you're advocating for? Do you understand things like:  => How he or she learns most easily. => His/her core values -- things that are vital to include in any futures planning. => What inclusion supports are critical for him or her to be successful.  **2. A Constant Desire to Learn**  An effective advocate understands that more is being learned all the time in the field of special needs. New types of technology are constantly being developed, new learning strategies are researched every day, information sharing is becoming more and more efficient. So to provide the best supports for the person you care about -- you need to stay tuned in to the information flow. This can mean reading books, subscribing to newsletters, taking workshops, participating in online conferences, and doing research online or at your local library or resource center. The Web offers a wide range of resources from those that are diagnosis specific to those that take a wider view of the special needs field as a whole.  **3. The Ability to Stay Organized**  It doesn't help to do research or highlight sections of the regulations if you can't find what you need, when you need it. Having an organized notebook or filing system of advocacy information is absolutely vital in this world where the paper constantly multiplies! Don't let chaos and clutter threaten your advocacy efforts. Visit this page for simple instructions on how to put together your own Advocacy Notebook. <http://www.ideallives.com/resource_kits.html>   **4. Knowledge of the Law**  I make the point in one of my workshops, that even the most confident and talented advocate cannot succeed without knowing the rules. Advocacy is like a 3 legged stool -- take away any of the legs (knowledge, skills, confidence) and the stool tips over. You can't win a game where you don't know the rules and you can't be an effective advocate if you don't know your legal rights. If you are advocating for a student, study up on the laws regarding special education services. To assist an adult, study the laws regarding adult issues like accessibility, housing, and employment.  **5. A Network of Personal Support**  Few activities in life are as emotionally and physically draining as advocacy. The pressure is high because the quality of someone else's life rests in your hands and yet the "system" is set up so that at very few moments do you have total control. The result -- a struggle to use your skills to ensure that the group system does what is in the best interest of the person you care about. I'm tired just TYPING that sentence! It's not hard to see why advocates need a reliable system of emotional support. Making use of online communities, support groups, and family resources can often be the difference between success and burn-out.  **6. Basic Computer Skills**  In this day and age the most efficient way for any advocate to gain the information they need is online. Unfortunately, not every advocate feels comfortable with their computer. Learning some basic computer and/or Internet skills can make your journey quicker, easier, and less frustrating. So can setting up your computer so that it becomes an asset and not another hurdle. For example, software can allow you to listen to a web page article instead of reading it or dictate advocacy notes out loud and have your computer type them up for you.  Being an effective advocate can be a formidable challenge, but by arming yourself with the essential tools you can make this difficult task a little easier, a little less stressful, and a lot less lonely.  *© 2003, Lisa Simmons; Lisa is the author of several eBooks offering ideas, resources and tools to help every special needs parent become a more effective Advocate for their child. For a free resource kit to help make the skills in this article a reality in your life, send a blank email to:* [*mailto:advocate\_tools@sendfree.com*](mailto:advocate_tools@sendfree.com) |