



MRESCUpdate

MIDDLESEX REGIONAL EDUCATIONAL SERVICES COMMISSION

Cooperative, Cost Efficient, Quality Services

Districts Can Enroll Special Needs Students In Employment Training Program

A Community Based Instruction (CBI) program, designed to help special needs high school students gain the workplace and social skills training needed for independent living, is now available to school districts.



Samir Pandya, who graduates in June from Piscataway Regional Day School, operates the new self check-out scanner at Shop Rite in East Brunswick's Mid-State Mall as part of the CBI program.

Already the Edison Township and Highland Park School Districts are partnering with the Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission to

provide the critical life skills training being offered through the CBI initiative.

The Shared Time Program between MRESC and the Edison Township School District (ETSD), began last November. There are currently a half dozen students from Edison Township and JP Stevens High Schools bused four times a week to MRESC's Piscataway Regional Day School (PRDS), for half-day social skills and employment training sessions.

For the Highland Park Schools, PRDS staff provides technical assistance so the district can implement its own CBI program.

The CBI program meets several New Jersey Department of Education Core Curriculum Content Standards for 21st Century Life & Careers, including "career awareness," and "personal financial literacy."



Piscataway Regional Day School Teacher Katie Grannis (L), and Edison Township School District Social Worker Holly Clark work on skill building activities with students in the new shared time program.

The Edison Township students participating in the PRDS program receive job sampling opportunities with community employers including: Kleenstar Dry Cleaners in Edison; Parker at Stonegate Assisted Living Residence in Highland Park; Woody's, a cafeteria in the Kessler Teaching Building on the Rutgers Piscataway campus, and 99 Cent Depot, also in Piscataway.

(See **Community Based Instruction** on page 7)

Strong Interest In MRESC School Security Symposium

In response to last December's shooting tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT., the Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission recently hosted a symposium on school security.

The School Safety and Security Symposium, co-sponsored by the MRESC

Co-op Pricing Program and CDW-G, attracted school officials statewide, including representatives from the Burlington County Institute of Technology, High Point Regional High School, West Orange, Hillsborough Township and North Brunswick Public Schools.

Sean Cavalier, Manager of Buildings and Grounds for the Mercer County Technical Schools, said the symposium was an excellent fact finding opportunity. "Our security is good, but we are planning major projects to make it even

(See **School Security** on page 2)

MRESC Tuition Rates 30-60% Lower Than Private Schools

In January, the New Jersey Department of Education's Division of Administration and Finance released the 2012-2013 tuition charges of Private Schools for Students with Disabilities throughout the state.

When the MRESC compared the Private School tuitions to its own rates for the 2012-2013 school year, the

MRESC rates were approximately 30 to 60 percent lower.

"Our goal is to support students so they reach their fullest potential possible, while being sensitive to taxpayer concerns," said MRESC Board President Dale Caldwell.

The MRESC's lower tuition charges are clearly being noticed by an increasing

number of school districts.

"School districts are recognizing that using our quality programs allows them to meet the needs of their special needs students without having to pay exorbitant private school rates," Mr. Caldwell added.

Last year the MRESC had a record number of enrolled students, representing 74 districts across 11 counties, said Mark Finkelstein, MRESC Superintendent of Schools.

"The end result is a comprehensive educational experience for students, satisfied parents, and reduced costs for taxpayers," Mr. Finkelstein said.

Mr. Caldwell, Mr. Finkelstein, and Business Administrator Patrick Moran, recently met with New Jersey State Comptroller Matthew Boxer to elaborate on the MRESC's cost effective approach to special education.

"I think he was rather receptive to what we have put in place over the past 37 years, and I look forward to continuing the discussion of our program with state officials," Mr. Finkelstein said.

TUITION RATES OF PRIVATE SCHOOLS COMPARED WITH MRESC TUITION RATES 2012 - 2013

MRESC SCHOOLS/PROGRAM	AVERAGE PRIVATE SCHOOL TUITION RATE	AVERAGE MRESC TUITION RATE	TUITION SAVINGS USING MRESC
MD PROGRAMS Piscataway Regional Day School Bright Beginnings Learning Center Academy Learning Center Center For Lifelong Learning	\$64,395.00	\$38,700.00	\$25,695.00
PSD PROGRAMS Bright Beginnings Learning Center Academy Learning Center Center For Lifelong Learning	\$67,367.00	\$47,160.00	\$20,207.00
AUTISTIC PROGRAMS Piscataway Regional Day School Academy Learning Center Bright Beginnings Learning Center Center For Lifelong Learning	\$83,288.00	\$47,160.00	\$36,128.00
Raritan Valley Academy	\$61,811.00	\$37,620.00	\$24,191.00
RVA Innovations	\$61,811.00	\$38,520.00	\$23,291.00
NuView Academy	\$75,812.00	\$55,020.00	\$20,792.00

School Security (Cont'd from page 1)

better," Mr. Cavalier said.

Opening remarks from Let's Think Wireless (LTW) representatives, included information about security equipment implementation at the historic Brooklyn Navy Yard.

The Newark Police Department's Peter Lutz was the keynote speaker. Mr. Lutz emphasized the importance of being discrete with certain kinds of information, in addition to how the NPD has coordinated efforts with the Newark School District in effectively responding to gang activity.

A roundtable discussion included participants from the West Orange, Cherry Hill and Glen Rock Public School districts, featured information about best practices in school security, and stressed the importance of staff recognizing their school security responsibilities.

"Like it or not, everyone in schools today are also risk managers, and must take ownership of their role," said Fil Santiago, Director of Technology and Staff Development at West Orange Public Schools.

Panel members discussed some low tech steps for improved security, like having police visit schools during non-crisis situations to familiarize themselves with the buildings.

Mr. Santiago offered a practical suggestion as well.

"If you have a class of 2nd graders in lockdown mode for several hours, they are going to need to go to the bathroom," he said.

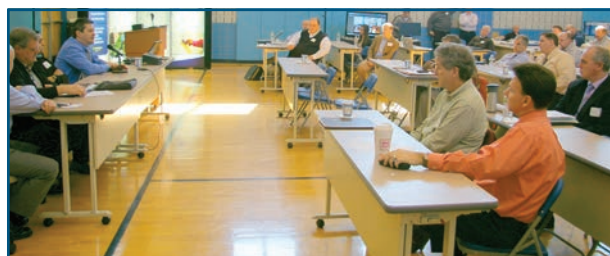
"Having some kitty litter in your room, while not the ideal solution, at least provides a way to address the situation."

Vendors had security items including surveillance cameras, intercom systems, identification card readers, and information about magnetic doors and bulletproof windows.

"The situation schools face is extraordinarily challenging, and nobody wants these devastating events to continue," said Gary Savyers, Regional Sales Manager for Axis Communications.

"The good news is that security equipment exists to help make schools safer."

The MRESC's Business Administrator/ Board Secretary Patrick Moran said the conference was both timely and informative for school officials who are doing their best to implement effective safety strategies in their buildings.



Panel members stressed that all school personnel must accept their role as risk managers.

"Districts are at different levels of security preparedness, depending on funding, age of schools, and personnel," said Mr. Moran.

"The challenge is maintaining an educational environment that is comfortable for students and staff, while simultaneously addressing security issues in a cost effective way. It is a difficult balancing act, but I think the people in attendance greatly appreciated the information provided by our speakers and vendors."

Companies represented at the symposium included Aiphone, Exacq Technologies, Genetec, Fortem, Axis Communications, IDenticard Systems, Panasonic, Cisco and Monaco.

Around Our Schools

Making Math Work At RVA



Raritan Valley Academy students gather in one classroom to work simultaneously on math assignments, ranging from Pre-Algebra, Algebra 2, and Geometry, under the guidance of veteran Math Teacher Maha Youseff.

It Takes A Community At BBLC



Bright Beginnings Learning Center students and staff created a bulletin board acknowledging the contributions of its many community partners.

Keeping Their Eye On The Ball



NuView students enjoy engaging in some physical activity during the school day, under the watchful eye of Physical Education Teacher Karen Polanski.

Vendors' Day



Several firms participated in Vendors' Day, coordinated by the Nonpublic School Services department recently, including: Benchmark Education, Continental Press, Deborah Raesly Associates, ETA/Cuisenaire, Keyboard Consultants and Lakeshore Learning Materials.

CLL's Got Talent



Playing the blues on keyboard is Edem Benson, at the Center for Lifelong Learning's second annual "CLL's Got Talent" show.

Teaching Life Skills At Academy Learning Center



A recent staff workshop focused on developing an appropriate assessment tool for staff to use to compliment their effort to teach "functional skills" to elementary and secondary level students. Age appropriate functional skills, essential for independent living, include: toileting, dressing, grooming, eating, laundry, housekeeping, cooking, shopping, handling money, and participating in community activities.

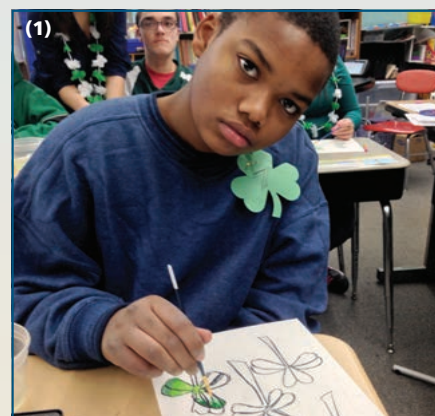
News You Can Use: *Employment Resources For Individuals With Special Needs*

(Information compiled by Dr. Erik Solberg, Principal, Academy Learning Center)

- **Division of Vocational Rehabilitative Services**
Offers persons with disabilities an opportunity to become independent through employment: www.state.nj.us/labor/dvrs/
- **Division of Developmental Disabilities**
Helps developmentally disabled students claim their rights in the community: www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dd/
- **New Jersey Technological Advancement Resource Program**
Increases awareness and access to assistive technology: www.njpanda.org/tarp
- **New Jersey Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired**
Enables eligible individuals with vision problems to achieve employment: www.state.nj.us/humanservices/cbvi
- **Statewide Parent Advocacy Network**
Offers training and information to parents: www.spannj.org
- **New Jersey Protection & Advocacy**
Advocates for and protects legal, civil and human rights for the disabled: www.njpanda.org
- **County Offices for the Disabled**
Advocates for the interests of disabled children: www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dds/home/cntyoffice.index.html
- **ARC of New Jersey**
Provides a variety of services for the disabled: www.arcnj.org
- **CIL Council for Independent Living**
Provides support for disabled students who have the potential for competitive employment: www.njsil.org
- **Alliance for the Disabled in Action**
Offers workshops and information on housing, employment, transportation and assistive technology: www.njsilc.org/middlesex

Talented Artist At PRDS

Ninth grader Kiere Lassiter working on his (1) "Drawing and Painting Shamrocks," the (2) finished shamrock painting, and his (3) Chinese watercolor of a tiger. Art Teacher Audrey Roderman says Kiere "always takes his art projects to the next level, adding his own personal touches." •



Helpful Messages Fill BBLC Buckets

Last October, students and staff at Bright Beginnings Learning Center placed anti-bullying messages in student buckets as part of the second annual "Week of Respect" against bullying in New Jersey public schools. The concept worked so well, that the school has continued the practice by sharing motivational messages over the course of the year. •



Guest Readers Help Students Read Across America



During a break from his law enforcement duties, Chief Richard Ivone of the Piscataway Police Department, reads to Patricia Pilao as part of Read Across America Week.



Education Specialist Naomi Vliet, of the New Jersey Department of Education, a longstanding guest reader, with PRDS Staff member Ellen Santoro (L) and students Lucila Charles, Brandon Brown, and Frances Coriano.



Newly elected Middlesex County Freeholder Director Ronald G. Rios was thanked by PRDS students for his participation in Read Across American activities.



Director of Nonpublic School Services Linda Lewis reads to Raritan Valley Academy students as classroom teacher Ramnit Kaur observes.



School Superintendent Mark Finkelstein engages Center for Lifelong Learning students as a guest reader during Read Across America Week.



Community member Virginia Gruenling (L), with MRESC Board Vice President Bill Petscavage and Middlesex County Freehold Director Ronald G. Rios enjoyed a presentation from Jason Hamilton.



Staff members Maureen Hodroski (L) and Jeanette Torres worked at Frank's Café to provide tasty snacks and refreshments for Read Across America participants.



Students from Bright Beginnings Learning Center wished Dr. Seuss a happy birthday during Read Across America week.



Middlesex County College President Dr. Joann La Perla-Morales working with students prior to taking a turn as a guest reader.

Welcome to New Officers



A poster highlighting positive character traits courtesy of NuView students served as a backdrop at a recent Board of Directors meeting, which included new members (L- to-R) Louis Masters (Monroe), James Baker (Middlesex), Scott Rocco (Spotswood), along with President Dale Caldwell.



Woodbridge Township School Superintendent Robert Zega is all business at his first MRESC Board of Directors meeting.



Milltown Board of Education Member Bill Petscavage, recently elected Vice President for the MRESC Board of Directors, also found time to read with students during Read Across America week.

In the News: Special Needs Students Must Be Allowed To Compete In School Sports

The U.S. Department of Education issued a directive recently requiring public schools to include students with disabilities in sports programs, or provide equal alternative options. The following "Letter to the Editor" supporting this decision from MRESC Superintendent of Schools Mark Finkelstein, was published in The Star-Ledger.

Dear Editor:

I was heartened to read that the Department of Education will now require school districts to provide special needs students with access to all sports as it relates to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Certainly nobody working in special education advocates any guarantee allowing special needs student's token spots on junior varsity or varsity teams. However, making it clear that special needs students can at least compete on a level playing field with others, is significant, particularly for moderate to higher functioning special needs student/athletes.

Like our counterparts in the regular education field, our mission is to help students develop their potential skills and gifts to the fullest extent possible. I think I can safely say that most, if not all of us working in special education, applaud the Department of Education's decision that school districts allow "qualified students with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in extracurricular athletics."

"LEED" Honor For MRESC



The United States Green Building Council of New Jersey honored MRESC Superintendent Mark Finkelstein (L), and Patrick Moran, along with USA Architects, for the "pioneering sustainable design" of the Center for Lifelong Learning, at its annual holiday party at the Olde Mill Inn, in Basking Ridge. The Center for Lifelong Learning is the first special needs public school to reach the United States Green Building Council's LEED Platinum level, the highest of four LEED certification levels.

Community Based Instruction *(Cont'd from page 1)*



Students learn functional skills like riding public transportation as part of the Community Based Instruction curriculum.

"The goal of almost any special needs program is to help students reach their fullest potential for independent living by the time they graduate," said Christopher Conklin, ETSD Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Special Services.

"We have tried this kind of program before, but the MRESC has relationships with area employers, and in-house training, which makes for an outstanding program." Mr. Conklin said, adding that additional students will participate in the CBI program at PRDS in the 2013-2014 school year.

Students also take supervised trips to stores to make small purchases, and learn life skills like what is entailed in taking public transportation.

MRESC Superintendent of Schools Mark Finkelstein said he looks forward to further expanding the shared time program with Edison Township and supporting additional districts in their CBI efforts as well.

"The ability for special needs students to integrate themselves into the real world upon graduation is critical in terms of how they are going to spend the rest of their lives," he said.

"Schools do a good job with many PreK-12th grade special needs students. We can further strengthen the effort to prepare students for life after high school, because we already have the infrastructure in place in terms of staff expertise, experience, and employer relationships."

The PRDS recently held a CBI workshop for Child Study Team members from several school districts to share information about its



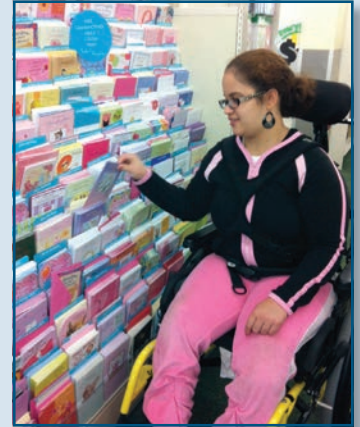
Students Hauson Benjamin (L) and Alyssa Thomas (R) handle a dry cleaning transaction with MRESC Admin Sec. Nancy Tavormina. Responsibilities include students picking up clothes each week from MRESC staff, followed by a weekly trip to the dry cleaners.

15-year history of equipping special needs students with the social and workplace skills necessary for employment.

The program featured a presentation by Marika O'Rourke and Raissa Pruss, showed students in actual workplace settings, toured the CBI Training space, and dined in the school's Frank's Cafe, which is staffed by students.

"It was a productive session, and we plan to schedule more in the future," said PRDS Principal Toba Knobel, noting that her school has six experienced, full time CBI staff members.

"Depending on what a district needs, we can help them develop their own CBI program, or manage the program for them. The main point is working together in the best interests of special needs students, so they gain the necessary skills to find employment when they become young adults," Mrs. Knobel said.



Noelis Cabrera, graduates in June, gains experience shopping for greeting cards at the Dollar Tree at Hadley Center Mall in South Plainfield.



Piscataway Regional Day School Teacher Katie Grannis (L), picks out some items at Target with an Edison High School student enrolled in the Shared Time program.



Kevin Laano learns about matching and folding socks at Wayne's Wash World III in Highland Park

Autism Awareness Swim-A-Thon At MRESC Aquatics & Fitness Center

April is "Autism Awareness Month" and the MRESC's Aquatics and Fitness Center, at 333 Cheesequake Road, is holding an Autism Awareness Swim-A-Thon from on Saturday, April 27.

Proceeds from the Swim-A-Thon will benefit Autism New Jersey, the state's leading Autism resource that provides essential information, advocacy and support to children and their families.

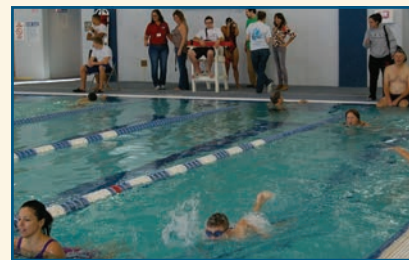
"We thought a swim-a-thon would be a productive way to draw attention to Autism, raise funds, and have some fun as well," said Academy Learning Center Principal Erik Solberg, a coordinator of the event.

Swim-a-thon participants can

collect pledges from sponsors based on the number of laps they complete. Participants can also collect "lump sum" donations for the cause from friends, family and neighbors.

The MRESC has operated programs for students with autism from 3-21 for over 30 years. Current schools include the Academy Learning Center in Monroe, the Bright Beginning Learning Center in Piscataway, and the Center for Lifelong Learning in Parlin.

To register as a participant, learn more about the event, or make a donation please contact Katelyn Dauphinee, Aquatics Coordinator, at (732)317-0333



Autism Awareness Swim-A-Thon takes place from 9 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 27, at the MRESC Aquatics & Fitness Center, 333 Cheesequake Road

Ext. 7786, or Dauphinee@mresc.k12.nj.us. For more information about autism, go to Autism New Jersey at www.autismnj.org.

Update On MRESC Graduate

Featured this issue: Kristyn Smith

School: Piscataway Regional Day School

Graduated: 2009

Current status: Attends the Cerebral Palsy League adult medical/vocational day program, in Cranford.

Hobbies/Interests: Kristyn loves making balloon sculptures with her father, arts and crafts projects, and spending time with friends.

Thoughts on PRDS: Loved being "the mayor" of PRDS, and enjoyed attending school every day.

Parent comments: PRDS has a wonderful program, and it was Kristyn's home away from home. Letting go is difficult for any parent, whether it is the first day of kindergarten, or college. The staff at the PRDS are a unique group of people, warm and fuzzy, but always professional, and so dedicated to our "kids." We always felt welcomed and appreciated for everything we did.



Kristyn's parents, who operate Eventfully Yours Productions, a "complete party planning service," have coordinated the PRDS annual holiday party and sing-a-long for several years.



Kristyn Smith



Middlesex Regional Educational Services Commission

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