

Special Education News & Discussion

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The Special Services Office is pleased to provide the 2009-10 annual newsletter, Special Education News and Discussion (SEND). This newsletter was created to inform parents and students about special education programs, practices and policies within the North Branford School District in an effort to enhance home-school communication. The newsletter, along with other special education resources can be accessed at the district website www.northbranfordschools.org.

New Guidelines for Identifying Students with Learning Disabilities

IDEA 2004 defines a specific learning disability (SLD) as: A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage. (34 Code of Federal Regulations § 300.8(c)(10))

Earlier requirements that students demonstrate a significant discrepancy between achievement and ability and that a processing disorder be identified to determine eligibility were found to be lacking in scientific reliability and resulted in a “wait to fail” approach before students were able to receive appropriate intervention.

In 2004, the federal government included new identification criteria for specific learning disabilities in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) and required state departments of education to adopt criteria consistent with IDEA 2004 that would ensure uniformity in identification practices across school districts within states. Connecticut adopted the Scientific Research-Based Intervention (SRBI) model focusing on core general education practices, core curriculums and instruction with a variety of research-validated interventions to address these requirements.

The new criteria for identifying specific learning disabilities and determining a student’s eligibility for special education services involves a shift in educational practices for many school districts. Despite the challenges involved, these changes can provide more educationally relevant and less biased methods of assessment, earlier and more effective intervention and more appropriate identification of students with specific learning disabilities. Most importantly, improvements in identification practices can lead to better outcomes for students.

The Connecticut State Department of Education has adopted the following criteria, consistent with 34 CFR § 300.309 to determine whether a student has a specific learning disability and is eligible for special education:

1. The child does not achieve adequately for the child’s age or meet state-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the following areas when provided with learning experiences and instruction appropriate for the child’s age or state-approved grade-level standards: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, or mathematics problem-solving;

2. The child does not make sufficient progress to meet age or state-approved grade-level standards in one or more of the areas identified above when using a process based on the child’s response to scientific, research-based intervention;
3. The child has been provided with explicit and systematic instruction in the essential components of scientific, research-based reading instruction or math from a qualified teacher, including the documentation of regular assessments of achievement;
4. The child’s learning difficulties are not primarily the result of a visual, hearing or motor disability; an intellectual disability; emotional disturbance; cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency; and
5. The disability must adversely affect the child’s educational performance and, as a result, the child requires special education to address her or his unique educational needs.

North Branford Schools is implementing the new guidelines along with the Response to Intervention model in all schools. Ongoing progress monitoring occurs for all students to allow for appropriate intervention and adjustment in instruction to meet student needs.

Staff Spotlight – Mrs. Mauri Shields, ELL Teacher

Mrs. Shields was hired in November 2009 as the district ELL teacher. She is responsible for providing support services to eligible English Language Learners in grades K-12. Mrs. Shields earned a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education from Southern CT State University. She recently earned her certificate in the area of TESOL (Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages). She has a wealth of experience in teaching English as a Second Language at all levels. She taught Survival Skills, Basic Skills, Beginner to Advanced Levels and Career Awareness at the both the Meriden and Wallingford Learning Centers. In addition, she taught ESL at Stone Academy and Grade 2 for three years in the Meriden Public Schools. Mrs. Shields had the opportunity to implement the Family Literacy Grant in Meriden. This was a statewide program designed to engage elementary students and their families in literacy activities. Her work with the External Diploma Program and School-Career programs provides her with expertise in understanding the requirements needed to meet high school graduation. Mrs. Shields is enjoying her work in North Branford so far!



Policies and Procedures 101— Child Identification Process for Children Below School-Age

Preschool Child Find Referral Process
1/2010

North Branford Schools conducts ongoing activities to determine if children require further evaluation and to determine eligibility for special education services. When parents have concerns about their preschool children, they contact the district and are referred to the preschool team at Stanley T. Williams School. The Intake Coordinator collects information related to the specific referral concern and the child's developmental history. Interview forms are sent to the parents and daycare/nursery school (if applicable). Upon their completion and return to the Intake Coordinator, a screening appointment is made. Screening in all areas of development is conducted by the preschool team, including a special education teacher, speech pathologist, school psychologist and the school nurse (when applicable). Based on the student's performance on the screening, recommendations are made, which may include re-screening the child at a later date, providing consultation or strategies to parents or caregivers, providing referrals to outside agencies, providing consultation or site visits to nursery schools, daycare centers, physicians, or making a referral to special education. Parents and other parties may also contact the Special Services Office to make a referral to special education.

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NBHS- Life Skills Program –New Home, Expanded Opportunities!

The Life Skills Program at North Branford High School has expanded over the past five years based on increased enrollment of students with disabilities at the high school level and increased participation in the Art of Living and Art of Leisure classes offered to all students. The Special Services and Curriculum Offices were moved to Central Office at Totoket Valley Elementary School this summer, paving the way for the program to expand. With the support of the Superintendent, Mr. Schoonmaker and Ms. Saulis, NBHS Principal, the former office space, Room 119, was converted to program space for students. Funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 was used to completely renovate the space. A fully handicapped-accessible kitchen was built, including a side-by-side refrigerator, front loading washer and dryer, stove and dishwasher. Food preparation and serving areas are now available.

Students in the Art of Living Class have already begun baking

and cooking with direction from their peer buddies and facilitated by Mrs. Artaiz, the special education teacher.



Areas will be arranged to provide opportunities for students to practice independent living and social skills. A copy machine, new lap top computers, a paper shredder, and various clerical supplies give the students opportunities to expand their employment and clerical skills. Instruction has been enhanced through the installation of a Smartboard, additional instructional supplies and a laptop lab.

The Special Services Department would like to thank Mr. Schoonmaker for his support of the project as well as Ms. Saulis, Mr. Winnicki, Mr. Slubowski, Mr. Choti, and the entire facilities department for their hard work.