

# Special Education News & Discussion

**January  
2008**

We are pleased to provide the winter edition of our annual parent 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.

Suzanne Wright, *Director*

Dr. Kris Lindsay, *Coordinator*

## Alphabet Soup: Understanding the Acronyms of Agencies that Support Students with Disabilities

State and federal agencies often use acronyms to refer to departments, programs and services. These acronyms can be very confusing to families and school personnel. This issue of Special Education News and Discussion will highlight the major agencies in the State of Connecticut

that serve individuals with disabilities in an effort to help parents sort through the acronyms to find the resources they need. In a related article, information describing the guardianship process for students who reach the age of 18 years old will be provided.

## DMR Changes Name October 1, 2007.

The Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) officially changed its name to the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) on October 1, 2007. Governor Jodi Rell signed Public Act 07-73 House Bill 7007 into law, ratifying the unanimous decision by the State Senate and House of Representatives.

Division of Autism. The criteria for eligibility remains the same.

Many individuals, families, employees and agencies have long advocated for a name change. At times, individuals with disabilities and their families have avoided requesting services through this department because the name was offensive to them.

Governor Rell's comments in announcing the change describe the importance of this action. She stated, "I hope that this change will set a model for our state - that it will remind us of the importance of language and the importance of the way we treat the people we serve. That's a message for both state government and all the people of our state. Even more importantly, I hope this change will provide you, your families, and your loved ones an additional measure of dignity and respect. It is exactly what you deserve, and it is our intention to make sure you never receive anything less."

The new name is a reflection of the services that the department provides. Services and supports available through the Department include case management, family support, community living services, regional centers, employment and day services, health and clinical services. The agency includes a Birth to Three program for infants and toddlers with developmental delays and a

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) can be reached at:  
160 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106  
Phone: (860)418-6000 FAX: (860) 418-6001  
Web Address: [www.ct.gov/dds](http://www.ct.gov/dds)  
Email: [ddsct.co@ct.gov](mailto:ddsct.co@ct.gov)

## The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)

The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) provides supports to young people who need mental health services. Young Adult Services (YAS) are available to eligible individuals between age 18 and 25 with problems including depression, anxiety and schizophrenia. The goal of YAS is to improve the lives of young adults by forming a "community of care" to address the needs of this population. Available services include medication manage-

ment, individual and group therapy, residential, educational and vocational supports. Services are voluntary and designed to support young adults to achieve a safe and satisfying life.

Contact Information:  
410 Capitol Avenue, PO Box 341431  
Hartford, CT 06134  
Phone: (860)418-6631  
Web: [www.dmhas.state.ct.us](http://www.dmhas.state.ct.us)

## The Department of Children and Families (DCF)

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is a state agency that provides many services to help young people and their families in Connecticut. The mission of DCF is to protect children, improve child and family well-being and to support and preserve families. Divisions within the Department of Children and Families include Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice, Behavioral Health, Medical/Foster Care, and Adoption Services. The Greater New Haven Office serves families in North Branford.

Child Welfare and Behavioral Health. The Child Welfare division includes Child Protection Services. The Behavioral Health division provides voluntary services available on a time-limited basis to eligible families for a child with a serious mental health diagnosis whose family is unable to access the appropriate services within their community.

Contact Information:  
DCF Greater New Haven Office  
One Long Wharf Drive, New Haven, CT 06511  
Phone: (203) 786-0500  
Web: [www.ct.gov/dcf](http://www.ct.gov/dcf)

The divisions most frequently accessed for school age students and their families are

## The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

The mission of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) is to allow individuals with disabilities to live and work independently. The Bureau has three components. The Vocational Rehabilitation Program assists individual with significant physical and mental disabilities to prepare, obtain and maintain employment. This division supports individuals in achieving their job goals through work evaluations, job coaching and case management. The Disability Determination Services unit determines eligibility for Social Security Disability Insur-

ance and Supplemental Security Insurance programs. These programs provide funds for individuals who cannot find or keep work due to the severity of their disabilities.

Contact Information:

414 Chapel Street, Suite 301, New Haven, CT 06511

Phone: (203) 974-3000

Web: [www.brs.state.ct.us](http://www.brs.state.ct.us)

## Guardianship of Persons with Developmental Disabilities

Students who reach age 18 are considered to be adults and therefore capable of making personal and financial decisions. For students with disabilities, the right to make educational decisions, including providing consent to conduct evaluations or implement an Individual Education Plan (IEP) transfers from parents to the student at age 18. Students are required to be advised of this right by the school district at least one year prior to the student's 18th birthday.

Some students with disabilities are unable to make informed decisions about their health, safety or care. In these cases, the Probate Court may appoint a guardian to supervise some or all aspects of the individual.

Judge Frank Forgione serves as the Probate Judge in North Branford. Judge Forgione was interviewed recently to share information with families about this process.

### **Q: What is the role of the Judge in determining guardianship for someone with a severe disability?**

A: The judge needs to balance the individual liberties of the person with the safety of the individual. As the judge, I want to maximize the individual's ability to have independence and control over their own lives while maintaining their safety.

### **Q: Describe the process of determining guardianship**

A: A parent files an application for guardianship with the Probate Court. The application is sent to the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). A representative from DDS completes an assessment of the individual and provides a report to the court. An attorney is appointed by the Judge of Probate to represent the individual. A hearing is held to review the application and the evaluation report. The Judge makes a decision based on the individual's level of functioning in many areas.

### **Q: Are there different types of guardianships?**

A: Yes, there are two different types of guardianships, plenary guardianship and limited guardianship. A plenary guardian is

appointed when an individual is totally unable to meet essential requirements for his or her physical health or safety and totally unable to make informed decisions about matters related to his or her care. A limited guardian supervises only certain specified aspects of a person's care because the judge determines that he or she is able to do some, but not all of the tasks necessary to maintain health or safety or make some, but not all, informed decisions about his or her care.

### **Q: When should a family begin this process?**

A: Families are encouraged to be involved with the Department of Developmental Services as early as possible. Families are encouraged to apply for guardianship when the individual is 18 years old.

### **Q: Where do families go to file the request?**

A: The Probate Court is located at the North Branford Town Hall

### **Q: What hours is the court open?**

A: 8:30 am - 1:00 pm Monday through Friday

### **Q: What documents do families need to provide?**

A: Families only need to complete the application for guardianship. The application is available at the Probate Court. Families may call the court at 484-6007 to request an application be mailed to them. The completed application may be mailed to the court.

### **Q: How often is guardianship reviewed?**

A: Generally, the guardianship is reviewed every three years. Individuals or guardians may request a review or change in guardianship at any time.

### **Q: What happens if a parent does not request a guardian for an individual with significant developmental disabilities?**

A: Every person who is 18 years old is considered to be an adult in Connecticut and legally capable of managing his own affairs. If an individual is not able to make his or her own decisions or care for his or herself and no guardian has been appointed, the parent is not able to make financial, medical or educational decisions for that individual.