



Engaging Families

Quarterly Newsletter for Parents and Families

Volume 1, Issue 2

April 2011



“...Finally, we're putting even more resources into this important set of activities because we need to do more--and we need to do it better..”

– Secretary Arne Duncan, Looking in the Mirror, Mom Congress, Georgetown University, Washington D.C., May 3, 2010

School Provides Inclusive Opportunities for Preschool Students

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As the Family Engagement Team approached the facility outside hung a large WELCOME sign. Greeting everyone who came into the building was the principal Julie Orgettas, assistant principal Lachonta Twyman and coordinator, Alma Ezell-Lawson.

In the gymnasium was more than 200 preschoolers from the H. Winship Wheatley Early Childhood Center in Capitol Heights, Maryland celebrating Music In Our School Month with “Bop Til You Drop.” Teachers in costume provided an atmosphere of caring and concern that removed all inhibitions

in both children and adults, as they all danced, jumped and moved to celebrate music in their schools. The participants demonstrated how music and movement made the difference in the lives of young children, with and without disabilities. March has officially been designated as the month to focus on music education in our schools. The Music and Motor Departments of Wheatley combined the Let’s Move theme with the focus on music month to get the school to shaking.

With the preschoolers, 3 and 4 year olds, were stu-

dents from Fairmont Heights and Forestville High Schools. The cadets and uniformed high school students partnered with the preschoolers dancing throughout the event.

H. Winship Wheatley Early Childhood Center is a large early childhood center located in the central portion of Prince George’s County. The school serves a wide geographic area that encompasses the attendance boundaries of more than 60 elementary schools. The program focuses on the needs of over 620 young children who range in age

Special points of interest:

- ☉ Register for Ensuring School Readiness
- ☉ Obama Speaks of Family Engagement in State of Union Speech
- ☉ New Family and Community Engagement Initiative
- ☉ Webinar on Special Education
- ☉ ED provides information to public

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Ensuring School Readiness Through Successful Transitions—Webinar (continued on Page 2)

The U.S. Department of Education and its partners United Way Worldwide, National PTA, SEDL, and Harvard Family Research Project invite you to participate in the sixth installment of this webinar series:

[Ensuring School Readiness Through Successful Transitions](#)

April 14, 2011, 2:00-3:30 p.m. (EDT)

Registration:

[http://www.nationalpirc.org/engagement_webinars/](http://www.nationalpirc.org/engagement_webinars/register.html)

[register.html](#)

Ensuring School Readiness will explore how and why smooth transitions among early learning environments are critical for school readiness and are the first step toward preparing students for success in college

Promoting Family Engagement

Regional Offices with Family Engagement Specialists

Region V—Shirley Jones, Chicago, Illinois, Shirley.Jones@ed.gov
Region X—Linda Pauley, Tacoma Washington, Linda.Pauley@ed.gov
Region IV—Jonava Hawthorns, Atlanta, Georgia, Jonava.Hawthorne@ed.gov

Please contact your regional office concerning events, activities, questions or concerns. Send comments or questions to parents@ed.gov

OESE/SASA Family and Community Engagement (FACE)

We're excited to inform you of our 'new' Family and Community Engagement (FACE), initiative. This project is being launched to create a forum for sharing ideas and best practices to promote more focused family-school interactions. Information regarding upcoming FACE activities is forthcoming; however, one of our first charges is to develop a parent listserv that will be used to share information, effectively. Please email parents@ed.gov, if you are interested in joining our

national parent listserv. We look forward to partnering with you in the Family and Community Engagement movement as we seek new and innovative ways to build capacity for systemic engagement.

For more information regarding OESE/SASA Family and Community Engagement, please email FACE@ed.gov.

Ensuring School Readiness Through Successful Transitions—Webinar

and career. Presenters will focus on what it takes to foster continuity as children move from early learning programs to preschool to kindergarten, and will discuss the specific roles of early learning programs, schools, and families in preparing young children to enter school ready for success.

This webinar will highlight innovative practices, explore the range of supports and services offered to young children and their families, and emphasize how to help families understand how to remain involved in their child's education as the child moves into the early school grades.

Jacqueline Jones from the U.S. Department of Education will discuss the importance of successful early transitions to education reform. Sharon Ritchie from FirstSchool, a research-based preK-3rd grade initiative, will discuss "seamless education" and how to use data to improve practice. Judith Jerald from Save

the Children will talk about developing early childhood programming with an eye toward facilitating transitions. And Whitcomb Hayslip will discuss how a Los Angeles-based transitional kindergarten initiative uses deliberate collaboration between teachers and families to prepare children for school success.

Featured speakers include:

- Moderator: Tom Schultz, Project Director for Early Childhood Initiatives, Council of Chief State School Officers
- Jacqueline Jones, Senior Advisor to the Secretary for Early Learning, U.S. Department of Education
- Sharon Ritchie, Senior Scientist, FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
- Judith Jerald, Early Childhood Advisor, Save the Children
- Whitcomb Hayslip, Early Childhood Education Consultant and Former Assistant Superintendent, Los Angeles Unified School District

Registration:

http://www.nationalpirc.org/engagement_webinars/register.html

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[Ensuring School Readiness Through Successful Transitions](#)

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School Provides Inclusive Opportunities for Preschool Students

from birth to five years. The school also has a dedicated autism program.

A leader in providing inclusive opportunities for preschool children, approximately 80% of the students enrolled in Wheatley have special needs and are identified through the Early Intervention identification process or through the Child Find Process. Twenty percent of the students are enrolled in regular programs for preschool students through Head Start and Prekindergarten. The school also offers an Even Start program for parents to increase literacy, enhance parenting skills, and provide job skills that can

lead to competitive employment.

The Family Engagement Team after the morning session toured the massive facility with Donna Lauerhahs, the Music Special Educator. During the afternoon session the Family Engagement Team interviewed faculty and staff. The parents and volunteers all spoke of the warmth, love and concern of the staff. The interviews with staff revealed that the school has a group of volunteers from the Foster Grandparents Program. The staff stated that the children love the 'grandparents' in the classroom.

The school provides an atmosphere

where the disabled students learn many skills from their nondisabled peers across developmental domains, thus many disabled students are prepared for placement in a less restrictive environment. One parent who had two children to attend the Center stated how the early intervention made the difference in her children's lives; both are now in regular classrooms and are honor students.

For more information on H. Winship Wheatley Early Childhood Center, go to www1.pgcps.org/hwinshipwheatley/.

U.S. Department of Education Provides Information to the Public

The U. S. Department of Education has an Information Resource Center that operates as a citizen contact center that offers members of the public information, referrals, and in-depth assistance on all aspects of Federal education law and policy as well as on nationally focused Departmental initiatives. Services are provided via a toll-free telephone number in English or Spanish (1-800-USA LEARN) and a Web portal at

answers.ed.gov, where citizens can access the answers to more than 132 frequently asked questions, as well as submit emails to the Department.



Call
1-800-USA-LEARN
OR
Visit
<https://answers.ed.gov/>

Obama Speaks of Family Engagement and Shared Responsibility

On January 25, 2011, President Obama in the State of Union Speech touched on the importance family involvement in education. "America has fallen to 9th in the proportion of young people with a college degree. And so the question is whether all of us — as citizens, and as parents — are willing to do what's necessary to give every child a chance to succeed.

That responsibility begins not in our classrooms, but in our homes and communities. It's family that first instills the love of learning in a child. Only parents can make sure the TV is turned off and homework gets done. We need to teach our kids that it's not just the winner of the Super Bowl who deserves to be celebrated, but the winner of the science fair; that

success is not a function of fame or PR, but of hard work and discipline." The President indicated in his speech that there is a shared responsibility with parents and teachers..

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Every investment in a parent is an investment in the child.

The Office of Communications and Outreach has a team of family engagement specialists that will work with the state and local education agencies to empower parents with the information, training, and education needed to be full partners in learning in the academic progress of their child(ren). The team recognizes that parents need to be equipped with the tools necessary to make them informed partners and equal stakeholders.

For more information about the team email parent@ed.gov.

Webinar on Special Education

Title: News You Can Use: Family Engagement and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Date: Thursday, May 19, 2011 at 1 p.m. EST, Noon CST, 11 a.m. MST, 10 a.m. PST

Registration Information: To register for the webinar, go to <http://tadnet.ilinc.com>, and click on "Public Sessions" (second option in the red ribbon on top)

Description: The webinar will focus on the Department of Education's commitment to family involvement, particularly for families of children with disabilities or at risk. The webinar will also focus on the resources that the Department provides to help families understand the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, their rights under IDEA, and how to work with schools to improve their children's future. Melody Musgrove, Director, Office of Special Education Programs, will be the featured speaker.

Office of Special Education Programs Funds Parent Centers

In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, funds Parent Centers to provide training and assistance to the families of the nation's seven million children with disabilities. Each state has at least one Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center and may have more, depending on its size. There are also 30 Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs) which provide information and training to underserved populations in targeted geographic areas. There are currently 107 Parent Centers in the United States.

Parent Centers serve families of children of all ages (birth to 26) and with all disabilities (physical, cognitive, behavioral, and emotional). Parent Centers provide a variety of services including one-to-one support and assistance, workshops, publications, and websites. The majority of

Parent Center staff members and board members are parents of children with disabilities so they are able to bring personal experience, expertise, and empathy when working with families.

Specifically, Parent Centers help families to:

Better understand their children's disabilities and educational, developmental, and transitional needs

Communicate more effectively with special education, early intervention, and related professionals

Understand their rights and responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the federal special education law

Obtain appropriate services for their children through participation in the individualized education program (IEP) and individualized family service plan (IFSP) decision making process

Resolve disagreements and understand the benefits of alternative methods of dispute resolution

Connect with other local, state, and national resources that assist children with disabilities

Parent Centers work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children with disabilities. They collect and share data from their work experience that leads to improved practices in serving children and youth with disabilities and their families.