

New Parent Brunch Planned

RRVDSS HOSTS INFORMATIVE SESSION FOR PARENTS

Parents of children under the age of 3 are invited to attend the very first RRVDSS New Parent Brunch/Workshop on Saturday, September 12, 2009 from 10 am until 12 noon at the REACH Center in Reno. New parents have lots of questions and this is a great opportunity to talk to other parents, make new friends, and learn a lot about the issues concerning them in the first 5 years of the life of their child.

The workshop will address early medical screenings, early childhood intervention, educational opportunities for children with Down syndrome, potty training, and transition options at the age of 3. This is an informal meeting and childcare will be provided.

If you are a new parent and would like to attend this event, please contact the Red River Valley Down Syndrome Society at 903-783-1922 to RSVP. Also, if you will require childcare for your baby or other children, please note that in your call so that arrangements can be made to accommodate them.

This is the first in a series of workshops to be held this fall. Along with this new parent event, RRVDSS will host a Special Needs Planning seminar and a workshop dealing with educational issues. Workshops are held on weeknights or Saturdays in order for working parents and teachers to attend. If you have suggestions for workshops or articles in our newsletter, please feel free to let us know. Parents' suggestions are often the basis for planning the presenters and topics at our annual Special Needs Conference held in late winter in Paris.

We Need You!

Want to get involved in the Red River Valley Down Syndrome Society? Want to help plan a fundraising or educational event? Or just want to help at the actual event?

We have lots of opportunities to get involved as a volunteer in RRVDSS in a variety of capacities. Being a volunteer is an important job—volunteers are vital to the success of the organization and the services it provides.

RRVDSS has started a bi-monthly newsletter just for our volunteers. It will be a way for volunteers to be notified of volunteer opportunities and choose them at their leisure in advance. The newsletter will be sent out separately from the Down Syndrome Digest, so those who wish to receive it should contact RRVDSS to alert us that you wish to be put on the list.

What are some of the upcoming opportunities for volunteers? Call us for more info at 783-1922!

- Childcare during workshops (next is Sept 12th)
- Buddy Walk volunteer workers
- REACH Center office workers
- Adult tutors
- Snowflakes & Diamonds Gala committee members
- Special Needs Conference committee members
- Newsletter contributors
- Holiday Party planners
- College/Adult mentors for Teen/Adult Group members
- Volunteer workers for Teen/Adult Cook-Out on 10/9/09

New Texas Education Laws Affect Students with Down Syndrome

By Chuck Noe, PATH

Now that the legislative session is over, information on education bills that were passed is beginning to

become more available. Of course the agencies involved will still have to write regulations. You can go to <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/Home.aspx> to list a bill number to read the actual bill.

HB 3 deals with school accountability, curriculum and promotion requirements. The requirement that a student perform satisfactorily on the 3rd grade reading assessment (TAKS) in order to be promoted to the 4th grade is removed. It "requires a district to provide accelerated instruction to each student who fails to perform satisfactorily on each performance assessment given in the third through eighth grades, which may take place outside of the school day or school year. If a student does not perform satisfactorily, he or she must complete the accelerated instruction before being promoted to the next grade level. A student who is promoted by a grade placement committee without performing satisfactorily on the performance assessment must be assigned to each subject in which he or she failed to perform satisfactorily with a teacher who meets all state and federal guidelines for that grade and subject." Even though an ARD has been able to (& can still) exempt a student from being retained, it is important to remember that the underlined items apply to students with disabilities.

"The bill authorizes the commissioner to suspend assignment of accreditation statuses and performance ratings for the 2011-2012 school year during the period of transition to the accreditation system established by this Act to be implemented in August 2013." It will be interesting to see what the new accreditation system looks like.

"The bill requires the commissioner to adopt indicators of the quality of learning for the purpose of preparing parent and educator reports in addition to other required indicators in this Act."

HB 171 "Under current law, a school district's code of conduct may specify whether or not certain mitigating factors will be taken into account in a disciplinary decision. HB 171 requires a school district's code of conduct to specify that **consideration will be given to** mitigating factors of self-defense, intent or lack thereof, a student's disciplinary history, or a student's disability that substantially impairs his or her capacity to appreciate the wrongfulness of the conduct, in each decision involving suspension, placement in a disciplinary alternative education program or juvenile justice alternative education program, or expulsion. Consideration of these mitigating factors must be given regardless of whether the decision involves a mandatory or discretionary action." This could give parents of children with disabilities more help in challenging decisions affecting their child. At the least, you could ask how the various factors and the child's disability were taken into account when making a disciplinary decision. It is common for schools to have a standard amount of time for disciplinary infractions. **If the school insists on a disciplinary placement, it does not hurt to request a reduced amount of time because of "mitigating factors"**.

SB 451 amends the Education Code to require staff development provided by a school district related to instruction of students with disabilities to be based on scientifically based research as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The bill requires a school district to provide this training to an educator

who works primarily outside the area of special education only if the educator does not possess the knowledge and skills necessary to implement the individualized education program developed for a student receiving instruction from the educator. This could give schools a loophole for excluding some teachers. It is important that parents monitor if teacher/staff actions or comments indicate that they do not have the knowledge and skills that they need. Based on this bill and IDEA regulations, parents can request that teachers be provided the training and support that they need.

In developing training, schools must consult with persons with expertise in research-based practices for students with disabilities. These people can come from ESC's, colleges or be other persons identified as qualified by the district. Districts may also use people from private and nonprofit organizations.

Chuck Noe is the Education Specialist for Partners Resource Network.

Specs 4 Us – Eyewear for Children with Down Syndrome

This is not a new product, but we thought it appropriate to let our readers know about this company and what they provide for children with Down syndrome. As most of us know, glasses are often necessary for a child with Down syndrome but ones that fit their face are often hard to find. SPECS4US, Superior Precision Eyewear for Children Who Are Special, introduces a new concept in eyewear for children with Down syndrome that eliminates the problems commonly associated with traditional eyeglasses. The mission of SPECS4US is to improve the vision and quality of life for individuals with Down syndrome by providing custom frames designed especially for them.

The Erin's World line of frames is engineered to fit the unique facial features of children with Down syndrome while offering stylish options handcrafted for an active lifestyle. Each pair of frames offers special design features not found anywhere else. Adult sizes and sunglass clips are also available.

Created by the mother of a child with Down syndrome and 25 years experience as an optician, the Erin's World eyewear from SPECS4US will help children and adults explore their world with enhanced vision combined with an exciting level of style.

You can find the whole line of Erin's World frames in Arkansas at: The Eye Group in Ft Smith & Teague Eye Clinic in Prescott; in Texas: Preston Eye Center in Dallas, Cooper Optical in Longview, Mineola Eye Care in Mineola, & Clearview Laser Vision in Southlake. For more information and additional locations, visit www.SPECS4US.com or call 1.800.586.1885.

Specs 4 Us

235 Troy Oaks Drive

Hiram, Ohio 44234

1.800.586.1885

Oklahoma Members – Weigh In!

The following submission appeared in the Letter to the Editor section of NewsOK on August 30, 2009.

A Large Drain

Since Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, with noble intentions but unintended consequences, the number of special education students has skyrocketed. This has been a large drain on the resources of districts everywhere. It's also helped fuel the increase in administration and paperwork that critics blame for public education's malaise.

Courts, under the prodding of parents, have consistently used this law to force schools to provide more expensive services of questionable value. Students are "mainstreamed" into regular classes, where a disproportionate amount of time must be spent overcoming their learning and sometimes discipline problems, at the expense of other students. Special ed students can't be suspended for more than 10 days even if they're a threat to other students or the teachers.

While all students are entitled to an appropriate education, some students should not have rights that others lack. This also points out that private schools, which can pick the students they let in and generally don't have these issues, aren't really a fair competitor to public schools that have to accept every eligible resident.

Robert Hanna, Choctaw

Hanna is a teacher in the Mid-Del School District.

What are your opinions on this letter? For those in Oklahoma, how do you feel about the statements made by this teacher? The Red River Valley Down Syndrome Society would very much like to start a discussion on this topic on our Yahoo group. Check it out at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rrvdss/>.

RRVDSS Members Chosen to Appear in Times

Square Video

Each year, the National Down Syndrome Society holds a national Buddy Walk event in New York City. During the festivities, a slideshow featuring individuals with Down syndrome is broadcast over the giant screen in Times Square. This Times Square Video (as we have come to call it) is made up of pictures of people from all over the U.S. Twice already, members of the Red River Valley Down Syndrome Society



have had pictures included in the video. This year, we continue the tradition with three young men from the Texarkana area.

Ethan Smith from Ashdown, Arkansas and twins Cason and Laken Hale from Fouke, Arkansas will be viewed by thousands in Times Square this September. Proud parents Justin and Jenni Smith and Terry and Chris Hale will be able to purchase the video after the walk in NYC.

“We were so excited to learn that the picture of the boys had been chosen for the NDSS video!,” said Jenni Smith (Ethan’s mom). “What an honor! The video will be a treasured memory for our family.” Chris Hale (mom to Cason and Laken) felt the same way. “It was the boys’ first play date together,” she explained. “I think it is great that it was chosen. The boys had so much fun playing with Ethan and we know it will turn into a lifelong friendship.”

Former members featured include Regan Swindle and Joel Tharpe.

Event Spreads Awareness Through Community

This year, hundreds will participate in the 6th Annual Red River Valley Buddy Walk along with Autumn Phillips and her family. Autumn is 5 years old and has Down syndrome. “We have been involved in the Buddy Walk since the very first year,” said Tiffany Phillips, Autumn’s mom and now Board Chair of the Red River Valley Down Syndrome Society.

“The Buddy Walk really brings our area together,” Phillips said. “And it has become a real regional event. ... It has created a real support system, an infrastructure of support, that we really didn’t have in the past.”

The Buddy Walk, an event designed to celebrate the lives of people with Down syndrome and raise awareness about Down syndrome, will begin with registration at 2 p.m. at the Sports Pavilion at the Love Civic Center on South Collegiate in Paris, Texas. The annual Buddy Walk raises money to provide support for individuals with Down syndrome and their families.

The Red River Valley Down Syndrome Society organizes the event each year. Four hundred people participated in the 2008 Buddy Walk. And this year, RRVDS will host the 2nd Annual Four States Buddy Walk which will be held in Texarkana at Bobby Ferguson Park next to the Four States Fairgrounds off Hwy 245. The Texarkana event will begin with registration at 10 a.m.

“We are so excited to be a part of the Texarkana area,” said Deanna Tharpe, Executive Director of RRVDS. “Being able to serve families in the southwest Arkansas and northeast Texas area is wonderful and we can’t wait to expand our programs into that area. The Buddy Walk is a great way to raise money to be used directly for those families in that area.”

Back in Paris, the Phillips family gathers walkers and donations to attend the walk each year as Autumn’s Army (their team name). Like most of the teams at the walk each year, Autumn has a large support system, and most show up to walk with her. In fact, they are often known to take home the Most Walkers Award. “Each year, it amazes me to see how many of Autumn’s family and friends show up to support her at the walk,” Phillips said. “It just goes to show you how one little girl can touch so many lives.”

After a couple of hours of family fun, participants will make the short walk (only one mile) with their families and friends. Walkers in Paris will walk on the new Trail de Paris while walkers in Texarkana will stroll around the park. Activities include bounce houses and slides, carnival games with prizes and music. David Chicken, children’s entertainer from Dallas, will be performing at the Red River Valley Buddy Walk in Paris. “We have been trying to get David here for a couple of years,” explained Tharpe. “He is such a fun entertainer. The kids love him and he is a repeat performer at the Dallas Guild events.”

The annual walk is a community event, welcoming all with free registration to enjoy the activities and learn more about Down syndrome. “The walk is important because it promotes acceptance and inclusion,” explained Phillips. “It is an opportunity to celebrate the lives of individuals with Down syndrome, to show the possibilities instead of the negatives.”

Possibilities are something that the Phillips family knows a lot about. Autumn attends Kindergarten at Detroit Elementary where her mother teaches Special Education. Autumn is fully included in her class and has been since she attended Pre-K last year at the school. Detroit ISD won the School Awareness Award for their efforts at promoting awareness at the 2008 walk. Sabra Vaughan, School Awareness Chair, encourages everyone to talk to their school about entering the contest this year. “Classes, schools, or even entire districts can enter,” she explained. “The goal is to spread the word about how much individuals with Down syndrome are ‘more alike than different’.” For information on the School Awareness Program, contact Vaughan at (903) 249-3499.

“Autumn teaches us a lot of things,” Phillips said. “She teaches us that we set limitations on children and adults with Down syndrome, not them. She teaches us that love is the most important thing in life and we need to learn to celebrate small victories as well as large ones. And most importantly, she teaches us that we are all valued members of our community and have a lot to contribute—no matter what label you put on us.”

Pre-registration for the Buddy Walk is strongly recommended. Registration is free, but a donation of \$20 per person will allow them to receive a Buddy Walk tee. Early Bird registration ends September 30th for the Paris event and October 9th for the Texarkana walk. For those who miss the Early Bird registration, shirts will not be available at the walk but will be ordered to be distributed after the event for those who make a \$20+ donation.

For more information or to register, call 877-273-4045 or visit www.redriverdss.org. The funds raised by the walk support programs that provide education services, information, networking opportunities, and support to families & individuals with Down syndrome in the northeast Texas, southwest Arkansas and southeast Oklahoma area.

Join the RRVDSY Yahoo! Group Today

Ever had a question that you wanted to ask another parent but not sure which one? Or need information about your child from a parent who's been there, but don't know anyone with the same set of circumstances? Or maybe you just want to share little joys with friends who understand what you are going through... RRVDSY has a Yahoo! Group that our members can join (hey—it's not new but we'd like to see more of our members on it!) and it's easy. Get individual posts in emails, a daily digest or just check it when you want to. You decide! Go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/rrvdss/> and sign up today!

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