HINGHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
SUMMER NEWSLETTER

July 2019

FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Dear Special Education Community,

I hope you are enjoying your summer and that you are finding time to engage in activities that you find rejuvenating. Last spring and the beginning of this summer have been full of excitement here in the Office of Student Services. We have been busy interviewing for 11 open positions and planning for the launch of two exciting new initiatives: *Inclusion Facilitators* at the secondary level and our 6th grade *language-based classroom* designed to serve students with dyslexia. It is with deep gratitude to the Hingham School Committee, the HPS Leadership Team and faculty for supporting these new initiatives.

We are looking forward to introducing you to our new staff and programs in our August newsletter. Along with the introductions of new staff, we will also be introducing you to our current faculty and hearing how they became inspired to teach students with disabilities. I believe that we all have a story behind the passion we bring to our teaching and it is this passion that sustains us through the challenges of our work. It comes as no surprise that teachers are committed to ensuring that students' academic, emotional, psychological, mental, spiritual, physical, nutritional, and social needs are being met, while diligently individualizing their teaching methods to reach all of their students. This is not a small undertaking and I'm sure that you will join me in supporting all of our superstars.

FEATURED FACULTY:

Gretchen Laudenat Murphy (Special Educator, South) and Elizabeth O'Neill (Assistant Director of Student Services) are the first of many stories we will share with you. I hope you find them as inspiring as I do.

Gretchen Laudenat Murphy, M.Ed.

I am grateful for the turn of events that led me to become a special education teacher. I was first inspired by my cousin who had severe autism and always seemed to gravitate towards me. However, my undergraduate work was not in the field of education. After completing an internship at Children's Hospital in New Orleans, I realized how many children needed specialized support. This experience, coupled by my affection for my cousin, ignited a belief that I embodied the skills necessary to support children who faced learning challenges and I knew then that I wanted to make a difference in the lives of children that struggle to learn. I felt impassioned to participate in helping children reach their full potential and consequently, realized that teaching was my passion. I went back to graduate school to pursue a Master's Degree in Special Education and received my degree from Northeastern University. My participation in this graduate program launched me into a career where I knew I could make a difference, where I could help struggling learners, and where I could be witness to students overcoming obstacles in order to be successful in their classrooms. To me, teaching is about designing lessons that reflect a deep understanding that each child is unique and has different learning styles. I love reaching those students who struggle the most and seeing them succeed. I want to teach my students to believe in themselves, to dream big dreams, to find their wings, and to show them how to reach beyond what they thought possible. Being a special education teacher is both rewarding and tiring, but at the end of the day, if I have made one small difference in the life of a child or a family, I become inspired and energized for tomorrow.

Elizabeth O'Neill, M.Ed., CAGS

The seeds for becoming a special education teacher were planted many years ago. My family became acquainted with the Exceptional Citizens' Week (EC Week) at Camp Fatima in New Hampshire. Camp Fatima is a traditional boys' camp, but for one week in mid-August, the camp opens its doors to people who have special needs. The campers who attend EC Week range in age from 9-90 and have various disabilities that originate from disorders such as Down Syndrome, Autism, and Cerebral Palsy. The campers participate in traditional camp activities such as swimming, horseback riding, and arts and crafts. When I was in middle school, my family would go to Visitors' Day during EC Week to visit with close family and friends who were volunteering. Then, finally, when I turned 18, I went to camp and volunteered as a counselor. I have been volunteering at EC Week ever since!
The seeds had now been watered.

After graduation from college, another unique experience was presented to me. I had the opportunity to travel to Haiti with a group from the St. Boniface Foundation. While in Haiti, we spent the majority of our time at an orphanage in Port-au-Prince. As soon as we walked into the orphanage, all of the children would run up to us, with huge smiles, begging to be picked up and held. While playing with a little girl, I noticed a young boy lying on the floor in a corner of the room. He didn't move or seem to notice that we were there. People literally stepped over him. It took me a while, but I eventually went over to him. I picked him up and sat him on my lap. When he didn't respond to me, I remember thinking that it was as though he didn't know *how* to be held or respond to any kind of attention or affection. Staff later told me that he was blind and had special learning needs. There was something about that little boy that drew me to him each time we returned to the orphanage. I always made sure that I held him and talked to him during our visits. Spending time with him propelled me on this path. I will never know how I impacted his life, but he certainly impacted mine!
My passion had begun to sprout.

When I returned from Haiti, I went back to school where I earned my Master's degree in Deaf-Blind and Multiple Disabilities from Boston College. During that time, I worked at a residential respite center and as a paraeducator at a private day school before becoming a special education teacher. I have been privileged to have had many volunteer and work experiences throughout my personal and professional life that have cultivated my passion for working with children and adults with disabilities.
My passion continues to grow.

IN CASE YOU MISSED IT!

The HHS Unified Track Team

In just their second season, this year's team tripled in size to include a whopping 70 students! Students with disabilities report that they have developed friendships with other athletes, have expanded their repertoire of abilities to include shot put and javelin, and have increased their confidence overall. For the full article, please go to: https://hinghamanchor.com/team-spirit-runs-high-on-the-hhs-unified-track-team/

East School Motor Path

With the support of Tony Keady and Becky Case, Marian Francis, East School Occupational Therapist, and Laurie Lucas, East School Kindergarten Teacher, worked together to create a new motor path for students in order to provide them with another tool to keep their engines in the green zone.

THE EMAIL PHENOMENON

As our faculty get reenergized for another exciting year, the Office of Student Services remains committed to supporting our faculty, students, and families while ensuring that teaching and learning remain our utmost priority. Managing competing demands is quite an undertaking for our teachers and staff, especially given the increased volume of email. According to Derks and Bakker (2010), email continues to be the most prevalent form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) and with the introduction of smart mobile devices, it has taken on a new dimension. Naturally, the increase in email communication has an impact on the organizational life of all, especially our teachers who are at risk of depletion of energy, health problems, and burn out if the demands of the job become too much (Derks & Bakker, 2010).

Of course, no one will dispute the advantages of email and the increased communication between home and school. Nor can we argue the convenience of email when teachers are unable to receive phone calls during the school day. However, it is important that we begin to engage openly about the volume of emails and the impact it has on the time devoted to teaching and learning. As we enter this new school year, please use email with sensitivity and discretion and be aware of the number of off-cycle meetings requested. Join me in supporting our superstars and ensuring that they have the balance, energy, and resources they need to be the heroes they are every day.

THE SPECIAL EDUCATION CONTINOUS IMPROVEMENT TASK FORCE

The Special Education Continuous Improvement Task Force is charged with overseeing special education evaluation. This is quite an undertaking and involves much discussion and healthy debate among its members. The Task Force will be seeking representation across all domains (parents, teachers (general and special educators), related service providers, and administrators) as we enter this new school year. Our work will focus primarily on the academic strategies course and extended school year programming. If these topics interest you, please be on the look-out for recruitment information that will be sent in late August/early September.

ASK THE DIRECTOR

Do you have a question about Special Education instruction, policy, or process? If so, please email your question to Lisa White (lwhite@hinghamschools.org) with the subject line: Question for Special Education Newsletter, and we may post your question and an answer in our next edition.