

## Reading Between the Lines of the IEP

PATHWAYS FOR Exceptional Children will be having its annual public Board of Trustee meeting on April 29, 2009. At this meeting, we will be reviewing financial and business plans for Pathways for the upcoming year and conducting our annual elections. However, most importantly, I will be speaking about the dedication and passion we each must have in the present economic environment to continue to keep the education of our children in the forefront.

First, we must understand the reality of special education outcomes that have occurred for many years, even when we were not experiencing difficult economic times. In New Jersey, 78.3% of students with IEPs graduated from high school in 2007 with a regular diploma. However, in 2007, students classified with special needs in the 11th grade scored at 44.68% average proficiency or above for language arts and literacy, and 32.55% for math. New Jersey was far from reaching the target rates they set for 2007, which were 85% for language arts and literacy and 74% for math. Unfortunately, New Jersey does not tell a much different story than many other states in America. The question remains, which statistic reflects outcomes associated with the investment in special education — graduation rates at 78.3% or employment at 38.1%? Irrespective of statistics and state of the economy, the goal of special education should always be to blend proficiency with academics

into functional skills required for employment, not trying to force bottom lines into budgets that ultimately cost society more in the long run paying for unemployment.

Lack of funding for special education has always been a reality that parents and schools districts face. In the light of harder economic times and budget cuts, these pressures will become greater. However, even more disturbing than economic factors is that, having worked with and known these children, I am very aware that they have always been capable of far more than these proficiency scores or employment outcomes are relaying. I have seen children with disabilities consistently

rise up to higher standards when *we* not only raise the bar, but also teach *them* to consistently set higher expectations of themselves. Low outcomes are not only a product of disability and lack of funding, but also of mindset. The failure of the disabled more often than not comes about when we as a society set the standard at bare minimums, or only what is required by law, not to the standard that is set for other children, which is “excellence,” or to raise them to their potential.

Governor Corzine gave the charge to the Commissioner of Education, Lucille Davy, to prepare the 1.4 million children in New Jersey with the “tools necessary to compete



and succeed in the 21st century workplace.” With an employment rate of only 38.1% for the disabled, we must question our educational system. As a result, parents must become more familiar with formulating an IEP that has an expectation of progress and reaching successful outcomes, not one that complies with the limitations of only “basic rights.”

Pathways for Exceptional Children invites the public to our annual Board of Trustee meeting on April 29, 2009 to begin to read between the lines of the IEP. We invite you to get involved in this process and come with the mindset to not only expect more for your child, but to get involved in developing innovative ways we can all work together to network and tap into resources that can assist us to do that. Some of the most resourceful and courageous people I have known are parents having children with disabilities. It is time for us to realize our potential, combine our resources, and begin by raising our standards to the level of our children’s potential. Bottom line, disability is not a predictor of success, but parental mindset often is.

—Melinda Jennis,  
President, Pathways

### Pathways for Exceptional Children

announces its

### Public Annual Board of Trustee Meeting

### “Reading Between the Lines of the IEP”

April 29, 2009

7:30 pm – 9:00 pm

Lazar Middle School Library  
123 Changebridge Rd, Montville, NJ

*Pathways is a statewide organization with a vision that goes far beyond Montville Township. Everyone is invited to attend.*

# The Annual Board of Trustees Meeting: Creating a New Mindset for the Coming Year

## 1) Creating Parent Action Centers (PACs)

Information about IEPs is essential, but we must move beyond just disseminating information into compelling people to action. Pathways piloted our first "Parent Action Center" or PAC made up of 12 parents who met for an intensive three-hour IEP workshop. The workshop spent time going over specifics about the law, but more importantly, taught the parents how to understand their child's needs and translate them into an action plan for progress. An IEP is a plan, but even the best plan means nothing if it does not translate to action and meaningful outcome. The parents in the PAC will continue to meet and share in a small group to get specific answers and learn to more consistently chart the progress that the IEP is meant to bring about. The annual meeting on April 29th will discuss the interest other parents have in creating additional PACs and how to sign up for these workshops and small group sessions. The expectation is to train these PACs to "pay it forward" and teach other PACs to form and begin to empower each other to help their children.

## 2) Strengthening After-School Programs:

Our goal has always been to assist schools and community by providing more academic and functional outcomes for children with special needs through summer camps and after-school programs. In difficult economic times, families may not be able to afford personal tutoring. At our annual meeting on April 29th, Pathways will be exploring ways we can support families by creating small after-school homework programs staffed with teachers and trained mentors. We are also looking to expand our Magic of Reading program to include a combination of writing and reading for children above the second grade level. Pathways will also continue to make social skills and employment programs a priority. We will need your help and input to chart our course and set our organizational priorities for these programs. All of our programs are designed to proactively get children ready to meet the real world and coincide with Governor Corzine's charge of preparing children with the "tools necessary to compete and succeed in the 21st century workplace."

## 3) Focusing on "Train the Trainer" Concepts

Pathways has spent the last six years piloting and building a strong foundation of programs, and we will continue to work toward improving what we do. So much of our success has come from exploring new concepts and applying what we already know. A simple, common sense approach is often the key. However, the time has come for Pathways to put our ideas and successes on paper. Our goal this year is to begin publishing guidebooks and videos and provide formalized trainings to teach others to duplicate programs we have successfully implemented. Embedded in this, we will be discussing our new "Dream It Forward Challenge," which promises to help communities get back to the basics of supporting each other with volunteerism and service. Many may not have the economic means to help but can give a few hours of time each year to promoting our children's success. Our exciting "Dream It Forward" concept will be introduced at our annual meeting where the emphasis will be on strengthening community, which has always proven to be our greatest resource.

## Pathways for Exceptional Children Announces Available Board of Trustee and Officer Positions

The following are positions that will be open and voted upon on April 29, 2009:

- a) Six Board of Trustee positions – 2-year term
- b) Vice President – 2-year term
- b) Secretary – 1 year term
- c) Treasurer – 2 year term

You do not have to be a Montville resident or parent of a child with special needs to be elected. Everyone is welcome to submit a small biography or resume for the above positions. Names of applicants for elected positions will be posted on our website [www.montvillepec.org](http://www.montvillepec.org) by April 19, 2009. You must be a member of Pathways to vote for board of trustee members or run for any position. Membership forms are posted on our website. If you have questions or would like a job description of any available position above, email [mvtpec@aol.com](mailto:mvtpec@aol.com).



## Pathways' Annual Meeting

Wednesday, April 29, 2009

7:30pm – 9:00pm

Lazar Middle School Library  
123 Changebridge Rd, Montville

**Recreation Programs:** Upcoming programs are posted on our website at the beginning of each month. You can visit [www.montvillepec.org](http://www.montvillepec.org) and click on "Children's Programs," or the Recreation Department's website: [www.montvillenj.org](http://www.montvillenj.org). Click on Municipal Services, then Parks & Recreation, then Forms & Flyers.

**PATHWAYS**  
for Exceptional Children

What a child needs to be exceptional.