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Cheltenham Parents Lead Wellness Initiative

By Carol Kalos

The United Parents Group's Food Service Committee serves as an outstanding example of how parents can influence a school district's practices, and its work is becoming a model for other Pennsylvania school districts. For the past several years, the UPG Food Committee has met to address parents' questions with District representatives and with Chartwells, the company that contracts with the District to provide food service for Cheltenham students. Recently, a grant submitted by parents, District administrators, and Chartwells representatives has been selected for funding to improve students' nutrition.

The committee received the \$6,000 grant from Project PA, which is administered for the United States Department of Agriculture by Penn State University in partnership with the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The purpose of the grant will be to encourage Elkins Park School (EP) students to taste new fruits and vegetables and to appreciate their nutritional value. The long-term goal is to permanently improve the "nutritional environment" of the school and then to apply the programs at other District schools. The initiatives established by the grant will also serve as one of fifteen demonstration projects throughout the Commonwealth, enabling other school districts to

benefit.

Nutritionists believe that children must sample a new food ten times to "learn" to enjoy it, so one new produce item will be introduced each month at EP for five months during the 2005-06 school year. A student survey will determine which fruits and vegetables Chartwells will offer. The grant will fund prizes for students who try each new taste treat as part of their lunch, either by itself or as an ingredient. Students will also earn rewards for creating posters about the new foods.

Led by Professor Laura Frank, a Cheltenham parent who teaches nutrition at Immaculata University, the grant team overseeing the activities includes Chartwells' Maureen Cahill, student Daniel Dromboski, school nurse Elaine Hrynko, health and physical education teacher Phyllis Murr, principal Carol Nejman, and parent Elizabeth Westgard. In 2006-07, a federal "Wellness Initiative" will require that all schools create advisory committees similar to the grant team.

In addition to Elkins Park School's recognition by the Project PA grant, the Pennsylvania Advocates for Nutrition and Activity (PANA) has named EP a Keystone Healthy Zone School. Look for the new banner flying proudly outside the school.

The Chance to Feel Included

By Jennie Brantner

Reflect upon a time when you felt like "the outsider," the new person on the block or "stranger in a strange land." For most of us, feelings of not belonging are transient. We are given opportunities to "prove ourselves"; people get to know us and we find our niche in the social fabric. However, for children with learning differences, their social sphere is often severely limited. Past educational practices have segregated them in special classrooms with the intent to more closely address their special needs without the competing interests of kids in the mainstream.

And while these arrangements can provide

beneficial academic benefits, frequently they are accompanied by exclusion from a normal social experience. Often rejected by their peers in regular classrooms, special education students become subject to "social shunning" and the taunts of children who may fear what they do not understand. However, every child needs the opportunity to engage in normal social experiences. Practice in the "give and take" of everyday interactions sets the stage for social skill development and as the child learns acceptable behavior, his/her confidence and independence grow.

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The United Parents Group

Mission Statement

The United Parents Group (UPG), an umbrella organization comprised of parent representatives from all the public schools in the Cheltenham School District, serves as a vehicle to facilitate communication among parents, administration and the school board to ensure the continued excellence of education provided by the District.

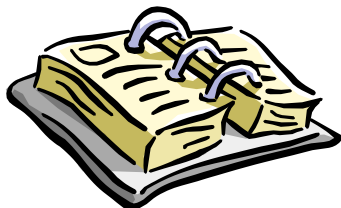
Please, check us out on the School District Web Site at:

www.cheltenham.org/upg

If you would like to be placed on our E-mail distribution list or if you have a question or concern you can contact us at:

UPG@Cheltenham.org

Mark Your Calendar



Everyone is welcome!

UPG District-wide Diversity Committee Meeting

Tuesday, May 31 at 7:30 PM
Beth Shalom Congregation
Old York & Foxcroft Roads
Elkins Park

Representative Chaka Fattah will speak about education

Friday, June 3
9:30 - 10:30 AM
Room 119
Administration Building
1000 Ashbourne Road
Elkins Park

A Chance.... continued.

In an effort to address both the educational and social needs of all our children, the School District has initiated a well-documented approach, "inclusion," that provides the same social opportunities to each pupil and also focuses on academic needs. Parent Susan Davis has found that "the extra supports that are brought into the classroom to help the child with the disability help everyone. The teacher can split the class and work with the more talented children in a particular subject, while the special education teacher may work with the children who need additional help or support."

In fact, many parents of children who have participated in the new inclusive approach to education offered by the District celebrate the change. Susan D'Lauro has a daughter who is a general education student in a first grade inclusion classroom and who

"has been lucky to benefit from the extra support..." Missy Keyser explains that the "inclusion program" offers the opportunity for all children "to learn from one general education teacher and one special education teacher in the same room without anyone drawing attention to a child's learning differences." She says "inclusion also provides opportunities for the other students that may need a little help with a new concept that they are seeing and learning for the first time" because of the extra instructor in the classroom.

Best of all, this shared educational experience has meant that children are learning to value each other as individuals despite their differences, barriers to acceptance are falling, and the needs of all our children can be addressed for the mutual benefit of each student.

From the desk of... the Director of Pupil Services

Each issue of the UPG Newsletter features a message from a representative of the Cheltenham School System.

Dear Parents or Guardians:

The term "inclusion" refers to the provision of special education supports and services to students with disabilities, or what we prefer to call students with learning differences, in the general education classroom. Students with disabilities are not educated in separate self-contained classrooms, or pulled out of their general education classroom and brought to another room to receive their instruction with other students with disabilities. They receive their instruction with the necessary supports and services in the general education classroom. In an inclusive classroom the general education and special education teacher and classroom assistant work collaboratively to provide comprehensive and integrated services and programming for all students.

Inclusion is a means to end social segregation. Ending social segregation is a goal that is addressed in the district's Strategic Plan. A vision of the district is to provide an environment that is accepting and tolerant of all diversity, and where high expectations are set for all students. Inclusion will assist the district in realizing this vision.

Inclusion is both a philosophy of life as well as an educational placement option for students with disabilities. Inclusive educational practices impact the way students with disabilities are viewed and treated; in an inclusive school all children are valued members of their school community. Inclusion is not something that a student has to earn by maintaining a specific grade point average. Inclusion is a right for students with disabilities. Choosing not to implement inclusion is not an option.

Inclusion does not just benefit students with disabilities. Inclusion allows all of the students in the classroom to have access to the attention of an additional teacher and/or classroom assistant. Inclusion affords all of the students the opportunity to receive academic support and/or enrichment throughout much of the school day. In an inclusive classroom students with and without disabilities live and learn together, realizing that every child has strengths which others can celebrate.

Glenside and Elkins Park have been implementing inclusive educational practices since 2003, and 2004 respectively. During the 2005-06 school year Elkins Park will increase the number of inclusive classrooms, and inclusion will expand to Cheltenham, Myers, Wyncote, and Cedarbrook.

A meeting will be held on Thursday, June 9, 2005 at Cedarbrook Middle School at 7:45 pm for parents who are interested in learning more about inclusion. It will be an excellent opportunity to hear from the parents, teachers and administrators who have experienced inclusion, as well as from the principals who will be implementing inclusion for the upcoming school year. We welcome your attendance at this meeting. Childcare will be provided.

I welcome your questions. Send inquiries to MMontgomery@Cheltenham.org.

Sincerely,
Mary Montgomery, Ed.D.