



## SPECIAL EDUCATION UPDATE

We are pleased to announce another addition to our Special Education Team, Ms. Lori Hess! She is the Special Education Teacher for the Life Skills classroom at Monson High School. She brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in working with students with special needs.

As spring is quickly approaching, the special education teams have been having discussions about transitions for our students. Some students may be transitioning from different grade levels within the same school, while other students are preparing for transitions to a new building. The special education teams have been meeting monthly across the district with a focus on planning smooth and positive transitions for our students. Please contact your child's special education liaison with any questions related to your child's transition for next school year.

## MONSON SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL (MSEPAC) UPDATE

The MSEPAC held its third meeting of the school year on March 7<sup>th</sup> from 6:00-8:00 pm in the School Committee Room at Quarry Hill Community School. A "meet and greet" was held to welcome newest special education staff to our district, Ms. Susan Ryder, GVMS Special Education Teacher and Ms. Lori Hess, MHS Special Education Teacher. Linda Surprenant, Western Regional Parent Coordinator from Family TIES of Massachusetts, provided a very informative workshop for parents called, "Let's Get Organized." Parents received the tools to organize their child's medical and school records, prepare for emergencies, participate in community programs, and network with other parents.

Family TIES of Massachusetts provides information and referral services, emotional support, and trainings to parents of children and youth with special needs. Visit their website to find out more information at <https://www.massfamilyties.org>.

## TOPIC OF THE MONTH: AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

The ninth annual World Autism Awareness Day is **April 2, 2017**. Every year, autism organizations around the world celebrate the day with unique fundraising and awareness-raising events.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability; signs typically appear during early childhood and affect a person's ability to communicate, and interact with others. ASD is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a "spectrum condition" that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. There

is no known single cause of autism, but increased awareness and early diagnosis/intervention and access to appropriate services/supports lead to significantly improved outcomes. Some of the behaviors associated with autism include delayed learning of language; difficulty making eye contact or holding a conversation; difficulty with executive functioning, which relates to reasoning and planning; narrow, intense interests; poor motor skills' and sensory sensitivities. Again, a person on the spectrum might follow many of these behaviors or just a few, or many others besides. The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder is applied based on analysis of all behaviors and their severity.

In March 2014, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued their [ADDM autism prevalence report](#). The report concluded that the prevalence of autism had risen to 1 in every 68 births in the United States – [nearly twice as great](#) as the 2004 rate of 1 in 125 – and almost 1 in 54 boys. The spotlight shining on autism as a result has opened opportunities for the nation to consider how to serve families facing a lifetime of supports for their children. In June 2014, [researchers estimated](#) the lifetime cost of caring for a child with autism is as great as \$2.4 million. The Autism Society estimates that the United States is facing almost \$90 billion annually in costs for autism. (This figure includes research, insurance costs and non-covered expenses, Medicaid waivers for autism, educational spending, housing, transportation, employment, related therapeutic services and caregiver costs.)

#### [Know the signs: Early identification can change lives](#)

Autism is treatable. Children do not “outgrow” autism, but studies show that [early diagnosis](#) and intervention lead to significantly improved outcomes. For more information on developmental milestones, visit the CDC’s [“Know the Signs. Act Early”](#) site.

#### [HERE ARE SOME SIGNS TO LOOK FOR IN THE CHILDREN IN YOUR LIFE:](#)

- Lack of or delay in spoken language
- Repetitive use of language and/or motor mannerisms (e.g., hand-flapping, twirling objects)
- Little or no eye contact
- Lack of interest in peer relationships
- Lack of spontaneous or make-believe play
- Persistent fixation on parts of objects

This information was provided by the Autism Society. More information can be found on their website at <http://www.autism-society.org/what-is/>.

Wishing you a wonderful week ahead!

Sincerely,

*Suzanne Morneau*

Director of Pupil Personnel Services