

EXTRA SPECIAL EDITION

Parent Newsletter

Winter 2015 - 2016

Welcome to Edition 2 of the *Extra Special Edition* for the school year 2015-2016, the newsletter for exceptional parents of Calhoun County. Each issue contains information for parents who have children in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program in our district.



Special Resource Available

The Special Ed Connection is a resource available to parents of students who have an individual education plan (IEP) and are receiving special education services. This special resource is provided by the Florida Department of Education to help parents gain a better understanding of special education processes and learn how to help their child/children benefit from special education services. **There is no cost to families for this valuable resource.**

Here are just a few of the resources waiting for you:

- News and updates on the latest news and developments in the special education community.
- Tools that can help you learn how to be more actively involved in meeting the special education needs of your family member.
- *Smart Starts* that provide a quick way to gain a better understanding of almost 450 special education topics, federal regulations, case law, assistive technology, and how the special education law applies to your family member.
- A Special Ed Online Dictionary that lists more than 1400 widely-used terms with straightforward, easily-understood definitions.
- Special Ed Round-Ups that offer a fast and easy way to quickly access best practices on hundreds of special education issues from autism to bullying to postsecondary transition and more.

Parents are encouraged to take advantage of this valuable resource. To request access to the Special Ed Connection please email Parent Services at adamsj@paec.org or beth.johnson@paec.org. If you do not have access to the web, please call 850-638-6131 x 2310.

ESE Parent Survey

We value your opinion!

The 2015-16 ESE Parent Survey will be open from Feb.1 to May 31, 2016. This year, in an effort to increase parent participation, the Florida Department of Education is providing an individual paper survey for parents of all children receiving special education services. The surveys will be sent home with your child in the near future, with a postage paid return envelope.

We ask that you please complete the survey and mail it in or complete the survey on line at www.esesurvey.com. Thanks you in advance for your input.

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*“An investment
in knowledge
always pays
the best interest”
- Benjamin Franklin*



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McKay Scholarship

Dear Parent or Guardian:

We would like to inform you that your child **may** be eligible to participate in the John M. McKay Scholarships for Students with Disabilities Program, commonly known as the McKay Scholarship Program. This program was created to provide educational options to parents of students with disabilities. Currently, more than 30,000 Florida students are participating in this program.



By participating in the McKay Scholarship Program, your student may be able to attend a different public school in your district, attend a public school in an adjacent district, or receive a scholarship to attend a participating private school.

To be eligible for the McKay Scholarship Program, a student must apply for the program prior to withdrawing from public school. The student must have an Individual Education Plan (IEP), or 504 Accommodation Plan issued under s. 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (with duration of more than six months), and

- Have been enrolled and reported for funding in a Florida public school for the school year prior to applying for a scholarship (Grades K-12); or
- Have been a pre-kindergarten student who was enrolled and reported for funding in a Florida public school during the school year prior to applying for a scholarship; or
- Have received specialized instructional services under the Voluntary Pre-kindergarten Education Program from an approved provider pursuant to s. 1002.66 during the previous school year; or
- Have attended the Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind during the preceding school year's student membership surveys (Grades K-12).

To find out if your student is eligible, you may apply for the McKay Scholarship Program on the School Choice website at www.floridaschoolchoice.org. Select the McKay Scholarships link, then Parents, and then the link titled Apply for a McKay Scholarship.

To learn more about your child's educational options, please contact your school district's Parental Choice Office at 850-674-8734. You may also contact the Florida Department of Education, Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice Information Hotline at 1-800-447-1636, or visit the School Choice website at www.floridaschoolchoice.org and click the McKay Scholarships link.

In order for a student to be eligible for the program, intent to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program must be filed on the School Choice website prior to withdrawing from public school.

Please note this letter serves to notify you that your child may be eligible to participate in the McKay Scholarship Program. **This letter does not guarantee your student's eligibility.**



Just Take 20 Literacy Campaign

Department of Education Urges Families to *Just Take 20*

~ *Launches literacy campaign to help families
read 20 minutes a day* ~

The Florida Department of Education launched the *Just Take 20* literacy campaign to support K-12 Florida families with practical, easy-to-implement activities to add 20 minutes of reading to their day. Research says that children who read at least 20 minutes a day outside of the classroom do better in school and in life. *Just Take 20* gives families tips and activities to integrate reading easily into daily life.

"Parents play a critical role in their child's literacy development," said Education Commissioner Pam Stewart. "Providing families with strategies to make the most of teachable moments and infuse reading into busy schedules can increase student literacy and help Florida students succeed now and in the future."

The centerpiece of the campaign is an interactive website that prompts families to practice reading at home using a customizable literacy plan tailored to their child's grade level and needs. Each family can build its own family profile, score points and earn badges while having fun with various reading and writing activities. Activities include tips for struggling readers and many of the resources are provided in Spanish and Haitian-Creole. Online activities and materials are easily accessed on any smart phone, tablet or computer.

The campaign includes a portal for educators where they can participate in virtual learning courses, download materials to engage students and families in literacy learning, and track online reading progress if a family chooses to connect with them for more support.

The *Just Take 20* campaign is available free to all Florida families and K-12 public schools. In addition to the online web app, districts will also receive printed toolkits that will help them continue literacy engagement with families throughout the year. The toolkits will include event and activity guides, monthly newsletters and other communication materials.

For more information about the *Just Take 20* family literacy campaign, visit JustTake20.org.



KidsHealth Website

Welcome to KidsHealth!

If you're looking for information you can trust about kids and teens that's free of "doctor speak," you've come to the right place. KidsHealth is the most-visited site on the Web for information about health, behavior, and development from before birth through the teen years.

On a typical weekday, KidsHealth gets as many as a million visits. One of the things that make KidsHealth special is that it's really four sites in one: with sections for parents, for kids, for teens, and for educators.

KidsHealth is more than just the facts about health. As part of The Nemours Foundation's Center for Children's Health Media, KidsHealth also provides families with perspective, advice, and comfort about a wide range of physical, emotional, and behavioral issues that affect children and teens.

To do this, our editorial staff communicates complex medical information in language that readers can understand and use. And all KidsHealth articles, animations, games, and other content go through a rigorous medical review by pediatricians and other medical experts. Ongoing, scheduled medical reviews ensure that the information is as up-to-date as possible.

Along the way, KidsHealth has received its share of recognition — including four Webby Awards (Best Family/Parenting Site and Best Health Site on the Web), the Parent's Choice Gold Award, the Teacher's Choice Award for Family, and the International Pirelli Award for best educational media for students.

KidsHealth cannot take the place of an in-person visit with a doctor, who can perform examinations and answer questions. But we can provide unbiased, reliable information to help you and your family pursue good health and wellness for a lifetime.

For more information please visit the KidsHealth website at www.kidshealth.org.



Family Network On Disabilities

Family Network on Disabilities (FND) is proud to announce the launch of our refurbished website at www.fndusa.org. We've put a lot of effort into making things easier to find and navigate, updating the format, and adding new features – all to make the site more helpful to persons with disabilities, their families, and the professionals who work with them.



The look and feel of the site is all brand new. We've given it a complete overhaul and made FNDUSA.org a fun and interactive online experience for all families. No matter what you may need on disability-related topics or what language you may speak, FNDUSA.org should have resources for your family. With the click of a button, the entire site translates from English into Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Russian.

Please take a look at our extensive resource library, both national and Florida-specific, as well as our project pages with information on how we are working in your community and how we can serve your family or organization.

Visit our new Media Library. There you'll find such things as sound banks with common sounds that you might encounter in common daily settings. We've added this tool to help with social preparation. It's accessible on the go from mobile devices. Look at our social story bank, which helps parents and self-advocates experience social situations. Like our sound bank, our social stories are accessible on mobile devices on the go.

Check out our many free workshops at FND University. Follow us on our social media pages with a couple of simple clicks from the website. We look forward to you joining our family at FNDUSA.org.

Family Cafe

The Family Cafe is pleased to invite you to join us at The 18th Annual Family Café, June 10-12, 2016 at the Hyatt Regency Orlando!



Since 1998, The Annual Family Cafe has brought together thousands of individuals with disabilities and their family members for three days of information, training and networking each June. This year's 18th Annual Family Cafe will once again include more than 160 breakout sessions on relevant topics, a series of engaging keynote events, an Exhibit Hall with dozens of booths, and plenty of opportunities for connecting with other families.

The registration brochure is now available on our website. Online registration will be available on our website beginning Monday, February 15, 2016. In the meantime, you can use the registration form in the brochure to complete your registration by mail or fax.

To request financial assistance from Family Cafe, simply note your request on the registration form. Recipients will be selected by lottery, and notified of their status in April. Whether you register by mail, fax or online, your chances to receive financial assistance remain the same.

To make a hotel reservation for the event, call the Hyatt Regency at 888/421-1442. Make sure to mention The Family Cafe to reserve a room in our block at the special conference rate of \$119/night.

If you prefer to register by fax or mail, you can also download the brochure from the website at www.familycafe.net.



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Serving Bay, Calhoun, Franklin, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson, Liberty, Walton, and Washington counties

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