

Milestones Day School Parent Advisory Group Meeting Minutes: November 20, 2020

- **Milestones' Attendees:**

Facilitators: Kim Rockers - CEO, Kirsten Esposito Balboni-Principal, Heidi Warren - Project Coordinator, Adrienne Gauthier-Transition Program Manager, Alex Smith-Michaels-Founder and COO, Susan Foster-Transition Specialist, Grace Little-SLP

- **Parent Attendees via media/phone:** Trish Elliott (PAG Co-Chair), Rachel Reynolds (PAG Co-Chair), Maryanne Lee, Michelle Rosala, Jess Greus, Lynda Leary, Lynn Colangione, Lauren Baskin, Petra Bignami, John Hebert, Dawn Edell, Melissa McDade

1) **Topic for Discussion and Q & A:** “Executive Functions” (*led by: Grace Little, Milestones Speech and Language Pathologist*)

- a. The Executive Functioning presentation focused on supporting the development of goal oriented thinking.
- b. Grace defines what is executive function?

“Stated broadly, executive skills are those elements of cognition that allow for the self-regulation and self-direction of our day-to-day and longer term functioning.” (Kaufman, 2010, p.2)

Grace also talked about the neurological anatomy.

- c. How do challenges with executive function affect our students?

Executive function deficits are pervasive across many tasks, contexts, and environments.



Academic challenges: Following multi-step directions, Initiating tasks, Planning/organizing language, Time management, Remembering to complete tasks, Checking their work, Self-advocacy.

Functional Challenges:

Organization of space, body, items, Completing household chores, Completing multi-step hygiene routines, Independently navigating school-home transition and communication.

Social Challenges:

Independently navigating conversations (e.g. interrupting, talking for too long, etc), Making social plans, Navigating social misunderstandings, Making social inferences (“reading the room”)

d. What is the connection between language and executive function?

Language is a crucial component of human communication, comprehension, and demonstration of knowledge.

Milestones’ programming is based in multi-modal educational methodology to account for language deficits. However, language is still a significant factor in academic and therapeutic learning.

Because of this, the way we use language can have a huge impact on our students’ development of executive functions.

e. How can we support students with executive function challenges?

At School:

- ✗ Explicit teaching and modeling
 - ✗ Instruction in task-breakdown
 - ✗ Declarative language
 - ✗ Think-aloud modeling
- ✗ Embedded, universal supports
 - ✗ Universal classroom routine
 - ✗ Graphic organizers, visual aids, checklists
 - ✗ Timers



Grace stressed the importance of modifying your language and using declarative language:

- ✗ **Declarative language** is a method of commenting as a means of inviting someone to take action. It facilitates critical thinking and requires integration of information, which engages the prefrontal cortex.

Use sequential language

- ✗ First, then, next, last
- ✗ Adjust number of steps based on student's working memory
- ✗ If....then....
- ✗ Other temporal markers
 - ✗ Before, after, until, since
 - ✗ Consider working memory

Grace also provided great visual tools and strategies for families to help assist in developing skills. These frameworks are included in the slide deck for all families.

2) **Staff Appreciation PAG Event:** PAG co-leaders are Trish Elliott and Rachel Reynolds.

- a. The PAG will host a breakfast in celebration of staff appreciation on December 23rd from 7:30-8:30am. As a reminder this meal is a “make-up” for schools being offsite in the spring during the National Teacher Appreciation week in May, 2020. This reflects a rescheduled date/time to occur on an onsite day. More information about the menu and donations will come from Trish and Rachel.
- b. We thanked families for 2020 annual donation contributions thus far. Families may still contribute annual donations in December to support our staff appreciation breakfast and ongoing funds. Checks may be made out to: “Milestones” in any denomination (with the PAG in the notation lined).
- c. The PAG also used funds this fall to purchase snacks for our staff kitchen and to present a retirement gift to Diane Smith, our Administrative Assistant, who has retired after 15 years! Thank you for your support!

3) **Program Reconstruction (6 year strategy):** Highlights from Milestones Team Members

- a. Milestones received funding and regulatory approval in October 2020 for program enhancements, which can occur once every 6 years. Milestones has acquired approximately 10,000 sq ft of additional space on the 3rd floor of our current building. In this space we are pleased to announce a wide variety of services and expansions to our current programming. ***A constant contact notification was sent to all families after the meeting to describe sample programming enhancements in more detail.**

Some highlights of our program reconstruction approval include:

- New administrative conference room
- Robotics/STEAM programming enhancements
- Therapeutic Fitness Center
- Assistive technology center and lending library
- Activate program (Yale University) for executive functioning
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) will be added to our curriculum
- Expanded Post High School space with opportunities for more internships, partnerships and certifications
- Salary increases for specific positions to support recruitment and retention
- New therapeutic classroom opportunity
- Updated Painting
- Proactive planning for pandemic - related expenditures (staffing, disinfection, PPE)

4) **Updates from Milestones:**

- a. We previewed that information about pivoting to remote learning after the Thanksgiving break and winter holidays would be emailed to all families on Friday 11/20/20 after the PAG meeting.

5) Families are provided with an email copy of important upcoming dates:

- **PAG Dyslexia Presentation: January 15th, 2021 10:00-11:30**
- **PAG Presentation Topic TBD: March 5th, 2021 10:00-11:30**
- **PAG Presentation Topic TBD: May 14th, 2021 10:00-11:30**

- **Calendar Reminders:**
 - ❖ November 17th-30th, 2020 - Online Scholastic Book Fair
 - ❖ November 25th, 2020: Half day- Noon dismissal
 - ❖ November 26th & 27th, 2020: Thanksgiving Recess - No school
 - ❖ November 30th through December 11th, 2020: Remote Learning Pivot
 - ❖ December 2nd, 2020: Half day- Noon dismissal (Professional Development)
 - ❖ December 23rd, 2020: Half day- Noon dismissal
 - ❖ December 24th, 2020 through January 1st, 2021: Winter break- No school
 - ❖ January 4th through January 15th, 2021: Remote Learning Pivot
 - ❖ January 18th, 2021: MLK Day - No school

Community Resources:

- **Virtual Music Therapy for Kids with an Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Virtual Group, Thursdays, October – December 2020, 3 p.m, with JFCS of Newton / Waltham, MA. Join in with a JFCS Music Therapist for an hour of dancing and music with friends on Zoom.

* These Music Therapy sessions are designed for kids with autism and/or neurological disabilities, and children of all abilities are welcome to participate.

To register or for more information visit www.jfcsboston.org/COVID-19/Programs-and-Groups-Calendar or email Angela Waring at awaring@jfcsboston.org.

- **Parent Support Group of Children Under 18 with Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities.**

Calendar

WHEN:

November 12, 2020 – January 14, 2021

Webinar, November 12 2020 – January 2021, 7:00 p.m., with Vinfen of Cambridge, MA. Getting “cabin fever” from COVID-19? Want to chat with some other parents who are feeling the same way?

* Join Vinfen’s Family Support Services (FSS) for a NEW virtual support group for parents of children under 18 with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

* This group is open to Vinfen and non-Vinfen families



* The group will be facilitated by Patty Middlemann, an Outreach Worker at Vinfen’s FSS, a former Special Education Specialist, and the parent of a child with special needs.

* No commitment required, drop-in and join anytime.

Follow the link to Zoom meeting

<https://vinfen.zoom.us/j/9753201178?pwd=dVp2c1pTNINRUIF2a3pla3FxZy96dz09>

Meeting information:

Meeting ID: 975320 1178

Passcode: 753204

Phone number for the call is 929-205-6099

● **Support Group for Parents of Teens 13-22 with Behavioral & Emotional Challenges**

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

November 12, 2020 – February 18, 2021

Virtual Group, second and third Thursday of each month, 7 p.m., through February 2021, with NAMI Central Middlesex in Worcester. For parents of teens 13-22 transitioning-to-young adults with behavioral or emotional challenges.

* Facilitated by NAMI trained family members who share this experience.

* Group is meeting every 2nd and 3rd Thursday of each@ month

To register and obtain the Zoom link, contact ttapsgroup@gmail.com or call Dee at 978.697.3441.

● **“Especially for Me” Sensory-Friendly Museum Afternoon**

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

December 1, 2020

Acton, December 1st, 2020, 1:30 – 4:30. Sensory-Friendly Afternoons are all about inclusion. During these events, the museum is open to the general public, but group visits and birthday parties are not scheduled, to avoid crowding and support access to exhibits.

* A medical diagnosis is not required.

* Resources available to prepare for your visit include Story Guides to the Museum and Discovery Woods, as well a Sensory Guide. These are available both online and at the Admissions Desk

* There are also have noise-reducing headphones available to borrow.

* Discovery Woods is open year-round, but closes at dusk.

Pre-registration required to www.discoveryacton.org/visit/accessibility-inclusion-especially-me and scroll down to Sensory-Friendly Afternoons, or contact the Acton Discovery Museum fun@discoveryacton; 978-264-4200



- **Neuropsychological & Psychological Testing: Guidance for Parents & Professionals**

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

December 2, 2020

Webinar December 2, 2020, 6:00 PM, with Learning Prep School in

West Newton, MA. This presentation will guide families and professionals through the process of neuropsychological and psychological testing from when adults are first concerned about a child, through the testing process itself, and review the expected outcomes from an assessment.

* The presentation will focus on practical guidance as to how to engage in an assessment and to support children and families using evidence-based methods after testing is completed.

A short Q&A will conclude the event.

About the speaker: Dr. David Stein is a pediatric psychologist specializing in neuropsychological testing, particularly for learning disabilities, attention disorders, autism spectrum disorders, and intellectual disability. Dr. Stein also serves as an adjunct professor teaching pediatric assessment at William James College. He is the consulting psychologist for Lawrence Academy of Groton, MA and is helping to build a program to support students with learning disorders.

RSVPs to the Learning Prep School www.surveymonkey.com/r/W2PSSRZ or contact Korina Martin, Director of Admissions at kmartin@learningprep.org.

- **Managing Stress, Anxiety & Depression During Challenging Times**

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

December 14, 2020

Webinar, December 14th, 2020, with the Northeast Arc of Danvers, MA. Part of the Adult Autism Specialist Virtual Speaker Series. For families of Adults with an Autism Spectrum Disorder without an Intellectual Disability, and their Families.

* The speaker will be Cyndy McKinley, M.Ed., LMHC, LRC.

Fees apply, registration for the Zoom Link is required to pkizner@ne-arc.org or hburgess@ne-arc.org.



Making Sense of MassHealth & Private Healthcare Financing

Thursday, December 3, 2020

1:00 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

This webinar will give an overview of different private insurance options and MassHealth programs with emphasis on CommonHealth, and pathways to eligibility to MassHealth/CommonHealth. We will also discuss how to access benefits and services including the MA Premium Assistance Program, explaining associated costs; and changes/options that occur to health insurance when a child turns 18.

Presenter:

Pat Nemia, Project Director

Mass Family Voices/F2F Health Information Center at the Federation for Children with Special Needs www.fcsn.org/mfv

To register [click here](#) or contact Andrea Morris: Andrea.Morris@TheArcofGHN.org or (978) 373-0552 x211