

[Milestones Day School Parent Advisory Group Meeting Minutes: January 15, 2021](#)

- **Milestones' Attendees:**

Facilitators: Kim Rockers - CEO, Kirsten Esposito Balboni-Principal, Heidi Warren - Project Coordinator, Alex Smith-Michaels-Founder and COO, Julia Kimball-Milestones Reading Specialist, Joan Grzywna- Milestones Reading Specialist, Karen D'Ortenzio- Milestones Reading Specialist.

- **Parent Attendees via media/phone:**

Trish Elliott (PAG Co-Chair), Rachel Reynolds (PAG Co-Chair), Maryanne Lee, Michelle Rosala, Petra Bignami, Karen Byank, Sherit Levin, Leigh Cronin, Cindy Wolske, Kendra Koder, and 3 participants via call in.

- 1) [Topic for Discussion and Q & A: "Dyslexia" \(led by: Milestones Reading Specialists: Julia Kimball, Joan Grzywna, Karen D'Ortenzio\)](#)

Below is a description of highlights from the Dyslexia presentation. A copy of the slide presentation is being shared with all Milestones parents/guardians, and an audio recording is available by request. Please contact Heidi Warren (Project Coordinator) at: hwarren@advancingmilestones.com if you would like a copy of the recording.

- a. **Introduction: The Basics**

- i. *Definition of Dyslexia:*

"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge." -International Dyslexia Association

- ii. *Quick Facts*

Reading specialists reviewed statistics around the population of individuals with Dyslexia.

iii. Laws at Every Level

Reading specialists reviewed laws associated with Dyslexia and the various settings when the Disability Act is applied.

b. Experience Dyslexia

Reading specialists led various activities for participants to experience what it may feel like to have Dyslexia.

c. Symptoms and Manifestations of Dyslexia

i. Dyslexia Infographic

Reading specialists provided the differences between the different types of “dyse” disabilities.

- Dysgraphia- A specific learning disability in writing
- Dyscalculia- A specific learning disability in math
- Dyslexia- A specific learning disability in reading
- Dyspraxia- A developmental coordination disorder that impacts fine and/or gross motor.

ii. Infographic Subcategory Explanations

Reading specialists provided a helpful visual that depicted how the various systems in our brain are affected for each of the specific learning disabilities.

d. Dyslexia and the Impact on Social Skills

i. Friendships: Good News, Bad News

Good news: How this can affect friendships

Intuitive = can typically read people rather well

Creative = out of the box thinking can lead to fun adventures

Empathic = can easily think from another’s perspective



Flexible = able to go with the flow in most instances

Detail-Oriented = can notice small details and changes

Storytellers = may be gifted in this aspect of language. It combines their creativity, humor, and unique personality

Bad news: How this can affect friendships

Poor Recall = forgetting rules of a game, interests, aspects of conflict

Poor Self-esteem = may compare themselves to others

Rigidity = “house rules” because they are known, and therefore safe

Conflict = There are many ways individuals with Dyslexia are vulnerable to misunderstanding due to language processing. It can be difficult for both neurotypical children and those with Dyslexia to navigate without adult help.

Perception = If the perception of a word is not always accurate, is the perception of a social situation accurate?

ii. Unintentional Lying

Dyslexia can have some unintentional effects. Reading specialists described how specific situations may come across as lying when a child is telling a story when the underlying cause is a language-based deficit (ex: recounting a sailing experience by describing riding on a “yacht” when the more accurate vocabulary terminology for the experience was “motor boat”).

iii. Rigidity

Word Retrieval, Processing Speed, Working Memory, & Automaticity: Difficulty accessing information can cause challenges with comprehension, which can lead to clinging to ideas, doubling down on opinions, or getting emotionally stuck.

Making Connections: Individuals with Dyslexia were described as out of the box thinkers. They solve their own problems with their unique own way of thinking. It can be difficult to undo the reasoning they used if they solved a problem on their own with their own (flawed) logic.

Schema: When a student isn’t able to access the information for what comes next or what is needed next, it can disrupt a transition, and a student can get stuck.

Emotional Regulation: When individuals are not at our best, our brains do not function at their best. For individuals with Dyslexia, a bad day was described as leading to an “Extra Dyslexic Day.”

iv. Zones of Regulation

Reading specialists provided a helpful visual that depicted how Dyslexia and the zones of regulation can be viewed.

v. The Emotional Toll of Dyslexia

Comparison to Peers - It is normal human behavior to compare ourselves to others. Children do this when they see the comparative speed and ease by which peers are able to complete work. This observation may be one of the first things students will notice before they are aware of their own Dyslexia.

Social Awareness - Individuals with Dyslexia tend to be very good at reading people (when regulated). They will catch an awkward silence, a sideways glance, or a twitch. This skill may quickly reinforce negative self-talk.

Perception - Participants were challenged to ask ourselves questions that exemplify the experience of individuals with Dyslexia. Ex: What happens if you can't trust the words you read to say the same thing twice? What happens if you heard someone say something that turns out to be very different from what was actually said? What happens if the connections you made, which make perfect sense, actually don't work the way you think? What if that b is actually a d? What happens if that person's name isn't actually what you think it is?

“Can't Win” Exhaustion - There is a lot of mental energy that goes into self-monitoring one's own learning deficits. Tired is a state of dysregulation, and dysregulation makes Dyslexia symptoms worse.

Automaticity & Recall - Automaticity and recall extend beyond academics. It can impact anything. Questions for reflection included: Can you recall 7 consecutive units of information without effort? Can you recall bits of information without context? For example, it was described that it can be embarrassing to forget the name of the day that comes after Friday or to accidentally ignore your neighbor when you see them at a store because you didn't recognize their face in a new setting.

vi. Tips for Building Resilience

Tips for resilience: Model failure; Say Dyslexia; Discover Dyslexia; Teach self advocacy.



e. Milestones Reading Interventions Overview

Reading Specialists provided an overview of what interventions they do at Milestones for students with Dyslexia.

- **Reading instruction** - explicit, systematic, multisensory, cumulative, diagnostic, and responsive to build phoneme awareness, decoding, and sight word recognition
- **Learning Ally** - human voiced audiobooks
- **Achieve** - Lexile reading measure for progress monitoring
- **Vocabulary acquisition** - supporting grade level reading while simultaneously administering reading instruction at each student's individual reading level to foster language comprehension and literacy knowledge

2) Initiatives from PAG: Ways to Explore Connecting Families and Goal Setting

- Gauging Interest in a Virtual Social Activity:** Last spring the PAG scheduled a social bowling outing for families, but this event was cancelled due to the pandemic. The PAG is interested in potentially scheduling a virtual activity for families and/or Milestones' parents and adults and would like input from other families. Suggested ideas thus far included: Virtual Game Night, Virtual Coffee, Sharing Suggested Resources Electronically (ex: submitting ideas that can be added to Milestones' website, shared by Milestones through schoolwide emails etc).
- Gauging Feedback on Email Reminders:** The PAG expressed interest in exploring whether we are offering the "just right" amount of email reminders for events and activities. Are we offering the right frequency and timing? Do you want more or fewer email reminders regarding activities/events?
- Next Steps:** Each year Milestones issues an annual customer service survey, which also informs our planning for parent-requested training topics at the PAG meeting. Within the 2021 survey we will also solicit input regarding families' interest in virtual social activities and communication.

3) Announcement of two PAG presentations to come in March and May: We confirmed the upcoming presentation topics for our remaining 2 PAG meetings this school year.

- PAG Presentation Topic: De-escalation and Limit Setting (led by Milestones BCBAS):
March 5th, 2021 10:00-11:30am**



b. PAG Presentation Topic: Writing at Milestones (led by Tim Mahoney, Assistant Principal/Curriculum Director): May 14th, 2021 10:00-11:30am

4) Check in status:

- **PAG fund balance:** \$1,979.66 (including the most recent Boxtops check of \$38.70)
- **3rd floor construction and program update:** Kim Rockers and Alex Smith-Michaels reviewed the timeline for the 3rd floor to be open and slowly to begin operating the various programs it will include such as: post high school programming, a lending assistive technology library, fitness center, and robotics lab. Construction is on schedule! A virtual ribbon cutting and tour of the space is TBD.
- **MCAS changes:** We reviewed changes to this year's MCAS exams that were announced by DESE based upon the currently available information. Case managers will continue to keep families updated about MCAS scheduling that affect your students.
- **Curriculum corner on Newsletter:** Our assistant Principal Tim Mahoney will begin including updates in our quarterly Newsletter to include a section on curriculum highlights.
- **Mask breaks and warm clothes:** Milestones confirmed that we are continuing to operate with mask breaks being taken outdoors by our students. This winter we advise families to please pack winter clothes for students' outdoor use.
- **Today's Email Updates:** Kim Rockers reviewed highlights from a schoolwide email sent to families on the day of the PAG Meeting (1/15/21).
 - a. Snow-related decisions for 2020-2021: This email includes an explanation of how as a default plan Milestones will pivot to a remote learning day if school is not able to be held in-person due to weather. We offered a disclaimer that if extreme weather circumstances are expected to contribute to widespread power outages we may override a remote pivot to instead schedule a "snow day cancellation" which would be made up in June. If a delayed in-person opening is warranted, we would implement a 2 hour-delayed opening (10:30am student arrival).



- b. Governor Baker Visit: This visit is still unscheduled. (*Update as of 1/22/21: The Governor's office expressed continued interest in hopefully rescheduling this visit at Milestones but no scheduling information was provided. Milestones will notify families again if/when we have a date confirmed*).

5) Important upcoming dates:

- **PAG Presentation Topic: De-escalation and Limit Setting** (*led by Milestones BCBAS*): **March 5th, 2021 10:00-11:30am**
- **PAG Presentation Topic: Writing at Milestones** (*led by Tim Mahoney, Assistant Principal/Curriculum Director*): **May 14th, 2021 10:00-11:30am**
- **The Following Calendar Reminders Were Shared:**
 - ❖ January 4th through January 15th, 2021: Remote Learning Pivot
 - ❖ January 18th, 2021: MLK Day - No school
 - ❖ February 11th, 2021: WinterFest Virtual Live Stream at 12:30pm.
 - ❖ February 15th through the 19th, 2021: February vacation
 - ❖ March 8th, 2021 half day: Noon dismissal due to staff professional development

6) Other questions and information shared by parents/guardians:

- Book Recommendation offered by a parent after the Dyslexia Presentation: “The Phantom Tollbooth,” which is a hilarious story set in the kingdom of Dictionopolis by author: Norton Juster.
- Accommodations for Learning Disabilities in Higher Education: Colleges offer disability centers. Students who have been on IEPs or who may require accommodations are encouraged to visit their disability offices to discuss available accommodations. Milestones’ students who participate in dual enrollment college programming gain experience in this through our partnership with Mass Bay Community College. Milestones’ Transitions Department can assist students and families with planning surrounding college accommodations.
- Assistive Technology: Milestones students have access to assistive technology resources, and through our program expansion a lending library will be available for students to try various supports.
- Self - Advocacy Support: Milestones’ therapists have access to self-advocacy resources. Select families requested support in this area, and materials were shared by our Principal after the meeting. If



families would like additional self-advocacy resources, please notify your case manager and request to receive materials shared on an individual basis after the 1/15/21 PAG meeting.

- **Additional Scholastic Book Fair Opportunity:** It was raised that some parents missed the virtual Scholastic Book Fair that we offered before the winter holidays. *Update: Milestones has scheduled a second online Book Fair, when families can purchase books and Milestones can earn 25% in book rewards. The second book fair dates will be: March 1st-14th, which coincides with Dr. Seuss's birthday and Read Across America Day. The link to our online Book Fair will be: <https://www.scholastic.com/bf/bulldogs>*

Community Resources for Families' Consideration This Winter-Spring:

Research Opportunity at Boston University for High School Students and Parents

WHEN: Ongoing

Boston University researchers are recruiting high school students on the autism spectrum and their parents to participate in a study on how schools support students for life after high school. Participants can complete an online survey and receive a \$25 Amazon gift card. Milestones has experience collaborating with this research team.

* For more information, contact: buroad@bu.edu or 617-353-2060 or visit: <http://sites.bu.edu/roadahead/participate/>

Winter & Spring 2021 Berklee Music Programs for Those Special Needs

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

January 16, 2021 – May 22, 2021

Winter & Spring 2021, virtual and in Boston – for a wide range of ages and disabilities. The Berklee Institute for Arts Education and Special Needs offers Arts education. These include:

- * Introduction to Musical Instruments Class
- * Rock Band Ensemble
- * iPad Ensemble
- * Music Classes for Young Children (Music)
- * ABLE Day Sessions Summer Music Program
- * Inner Harmony Ensemble (Music)
- * Daytime Moon Creations Theater Program (theater)
- * Step by Step (Dance)
- * Sensory-Friendly Performances (Music, Theater, Dance)
- * Private Lessons (Music)

For more information, contact rbernard@berklee.edu (617) 912-9104 or visit

www.berklee.edu/berklee-institute-arts-education-and-special-needs/arts-education-programs

* Berklee school of music is a sponsor of the www.spedchildmass.com website and newsletter.



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 tapsgroup@gmail.com or call Dee at 978.697.3441.

Snowshoeing Recreational Therapy Program

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

December 5, 2020 – March 27, 2021

Brookline, MA, December 5th, 2020 – March 27th, 2021, With the Brookline Recreation Department's Therapy Programs. Strap on your snowshoes, it's time for a fun time in the snow.

* Dates listed are for the entire winter.

* The Rec Department will contact people when there is snow on the ground and snowshoeing will be offered.

* Ages – please inquire with the host.

To register or for more information visit www.brooklinerec.com/190/Recreation-Therapy or contact Micah Barshay, CTRS, Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, Brookline Recreation (617) 730-2069 or mbarshay@brooklinema.gov

Virtual Adaptive Zumba Classes for Youth with Special Needs

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

January 12, 2021 – March 16, 2021

Virtual Classes, January 12th – March 16th, 2021, with the Burlington, MA, Recreation Department. Looking for a way to stay active from home? Get moving and grooving with this fun Zumba class designed for participants at all ability levels.

* The group will dance/exercise to popular songs.

* Please inquire with the host about appropriate ages for this event.

Fees apply, registration is required to www.burlington.org/162/Parks-Recreation or contact Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, Emma Jones, CTRS at ejones@burlington.org or 781-270-1937

Challenger Adaptive Futsal in Sudbury

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:



January 13, 2021 – February 24, 2021

Sudbury, January 13th – February 24th, 2021 , with the Sudbury Recreation Department. For ages 8 – 14 with a range of special needs. Challenger Sports provide boys and girls with an opportunity to receive high-level soccer coaching from a team of experts.

* Futsal soccer is indoor soccer, scaled down to small sided games usually 5v5 or 4v4 with a smaller ball.

Challenger Programs aim to improve:

- Balance, Agility and Coordination
- Technical Skills
- Gross motor skills
- Physical Development
- Social skills & Self confidence
- Communication & Teamwork

All programs will follow COVID-19 protocol and guidelines for maintaining a safe and healthy environment.

To register or for more information visit

https://sudburyrec.com/info/activities/program_details.aspx?ProgramID=30495 or contact recreation@sudbury.ma.us or (978) 443 – 1092.

T.R.I.B.E. Therapeutic Activities for Ages 13 – 25

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

January 13, 2021 – March 17, 2021

Virtual and In Person Groups, January 13th – March 17th, with the Burlington, MA, Recreation Department. For ages 13 – 25 with a disability. T.R.I.B.E. stands for Therapeutic Recreation Inspires Belonging and Enjoyment.

* This program welcomes and encourages people with different abilities to come together and experience recreation and leisure activities, both new and exciting as well as the tried and true favorites.

* The program’s goal is to provide social and engaging experiences for participants.

* In Person activities take place at the Recreation Center and may include arts and crafts, games, team-building activities, fitness, community service and more.

Virtual T.R.I.B.E. will be a chance for participants to connect socially with their peers from the comfort of their own homes. Emma Jones, CTRS, will lead the group through virtual field trips, interactive games and social groups.

* For the virtual group, access to a computer, tablet or smartphone to join the program via zoom is required.

Fees apply, registration is required to www.burlington.org/162/Parks-Recreation or contact Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, Emma Jones, CTRS at ejones@burlington.org or 781-270-1937

Virtual Disability Legislative Reception for Massachusetts’ Families

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

March 3, 2021



Virtual Event, March 3rd, 2021, with The Arc of Massachusetts and the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council. Persons with disabilities, family members, advocates, state agency heads and their staff, and legislators to meet and catch up on legislative priorities and other important issues.

* The Arc of Massachusetts will be honoring Senator Michael Rodrigues, the Chair of Senate Ways and Means.

* The Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council will be honoring Representative Josh S. Cutler.

* MORE INFO TBA – Additional information on how to register and how the event will be held and structured, as well as guidance on how to arrange virtual meetings with legislators and their staff members.

To register or for more information visit <https://thearcofmass.org/> or contact The Arc of Massachusetts (781) 891-6270 or arcmass@arcmass.org

Fifty Ways to Extend Literacy Encounters with Everyday Technologies

[Calendar](#)

WHEN:

April 6, 2021

Webinar as Part of a Virtual Conference, April 6th, 2021, 2 p.m., with the The Assistive Technology Conference of New England. For 2020 and 2021, the Conference will feature different AT/AAC-Focused sessions from November 2020 through May 2021. They have designed a program that covers a range of AT/AAC topic areas in a half day format to allow for a deep dive without a full day commitment.

* April 6th, 2021 – Fifty Ways to Extend Literacy Encounters with Everyday Technologies. Using Universal Design Learning as a guide, hear 50+ strategies to ACCESS information and develop multi-modal materials to introduce or expand upon information that is taught in the classroom.

* Options for increasing flexibility in presenting information allowing for personal expression and engaging all individuals will also be discussed.

* This event will recognize that the places where children are taught and the tools they have access to have greatly changed in the past year.

* It will also recognize that we must retrofit and “use what we’ve got” in many situations. Positive reading and learning experiences can still result when commonly found materials are combined with technology and imagination.

* There will also be an exploration of the features of MS Word, PowerPoint, and Chrome and free software to produce scaffolds for a wide variety of learners and educators.

Presented by: Judith Schoonover, MEd, OTR/L, ATP, FAOTA & Sally Norton-Darr, MS, CCC-SLP.

Fees apply – Registration and more information can be found on the Conference Registration page (scroll down to the date of event) www.assistivetechconference.com/ or contact (800) 916- 8324 techaccess@techaccess-ri.org

