

# Learning *For* Life

April 2013

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Wildwood School

[www.wildwood.edu](http://www.wildwood.edu)

## A Letter from the Director of Education



Cheryl Marcella  
*Director of Education*

Welcome to our spring newsletter. In this issue you are going to hear from some of our professionals who often do not take center stage at school. Despite the fact that sometimes they are in the background, our nurses, occupational therapists, speech therapists and social workers are vital to the success of our students. I am very pleased to give them this forum to let you know of the important projects they are working on at our different program levels.

I would also like to take this opportunity to update you on some ongoing efforts. The Family Advisory Council has identified two major priorities of focus. The first is home and school communication, which we all know is crucial for each and every one of our student's progress both at school and in their lives in general. The council will be working on developing the very best ways for the communication between school and home to occur both meaningfully and consistently.

Their second major priority looks at developing best practices for family involvement in the IEP process so that it is as streamlined and efficient as possible. The family's input into the IEP is so crucial that we want to insure that we are gathering information and giving feedback in the most comprehensive ways as possible.

I would also like to let you know that we are continuing to develop safety plans both as an agency and as a school. A security consulting firm has been contacted to help us in this process and we are all very confident that this project remains on task.

We have a full staff day coming up in April and I am sure many of you are wondering why we are using a full day in the middle of the school year. We know a day off can cause inconvenience for many of you but we felt the staff day was needed and that it would be an effective use of time. This year we have implemented many new processes and made significant changes and while we plan for next year, it is necessary to stop and take stock of our progress and our continuing challenges. We have a new data system that is going to assist us in coordinating information on essential outcomes garnered from our formative assessments and we need to make sure all of our staff is on the same page as we move forward. We thank you for your understanding and patience in this area.

It is very hard to believe that it is already April which means summer is not too far off. We are very pleased with the changes we have made at school and the significant progress that has gone on in so many different ways. We thank you for your involvement. Please send us your feedback, thoughts, wishes and concerns as we go forward.

## Circle of Friends; *A Collaborative Adventure*



Beth Turner  
*Lead Speech and Language Therapist, Elementary Professional Learning Community*

In older classrooms at Wildwood School it is a well established practice to interact with and learn from peers from outside one's own classroom. Until now, elementary students have interacted primarily with their own classmates and team. "Circle of Friends" is a pilot venture that brings small groups of students from multiple elementary classrooms together weekly to establish friendships while they are building their communication and social interaction skills.

Developed and led by Speech and Language Therapists, Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, a Physical Therapist and a Music Therapist, the group helps students to engage with peers through music, games, and play. The therapists combine their expertise to teach students the multiple aspects of developing friendships.

The goals address two of the elementary team's essential outcomes: "To improve communication skills to appropriately interact within their environment at the most independent level possible" and "To demonstrate awareness of self and others through the acquisition of leisure skills, interactions with peers and identifying feelings"

Research has supported the use of peer models as a means of acquiring new skills and behaviors. Teaching students to imitate and interact with students with whom they otherwise would not have contact, has opened new doors for our young learners.

Not only are students learning from each other but therapists are learning new skills from the collaboration as well. It has been a true example of Wildwood's value of holism.

## MeMoves; Joy, Focus, and Calm



Shelley Park  
*Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant, Intermediate Professional Learning Community*

Strategies to improve students' focus is one of the many goals addressed by our Occupational Therapists. Brain Gym, seated cushions, brushing programs, weighted vests, scooter rides, carrying heavy weights, and therapeutic swinging are some of the techniques used to provide students with sensory input to alert the central nervous system.

These techniques help the students to be more organized and better prepared to learn and acquire the essential outcomes of Wildwood School's Intermediate Professional Learning

Community.

"MeMoves" is a newly introduced program in our intermediate classrooms. Developed by a mother of an autistic child who researched the roles of music and movement on the brain, this program helps students increase their attention and calm in as little as two minutes. Presented on DVD with instructions for the students to follow, these short two-minute sessions provide soothing sounds and demonstrations of geometric arm movements that use both sides of the body. There are 13 sequences that engage the person's auditory, visual, motor planning, sequencing and bilateral coordination skills.

Some students may need physical assistance at first but with practice, assistance is no longer needed. Some of our intermediate groups are using MeMoves a few times a week while others are practicing daily.

To read an interesting article about the use of this program in schools in Alton, Illinois, go to <http://fox2now.com/2012/05/10/alton-school-uses-new-autism-teaching-technique/>.

### OUR MISSION

The mission of Wildwood School is to educate students with autism spectrum disorders, neurological impairments and complex learning disabilities by developing skills to live, work and recreate at their highest level of independence.

# Habits for Health



Marietta Lehmann  
*School Nurse, High School Professional Learning Community*

Increasing health and fitness is something that many people set for goals. The high school classes at Wildwood School have put this goal into action. One of the essential outcomes for students at this program level is that they “demonstrate independence with personal hygiene skills, healthy food choices, and wellness activities.” The high school teams address this through multiple avenues. One classroom is exploring different food choices for breakfast once a week. The Physical Education Department motivates the students into action in a weekly running club and high school electives always include at least one physical fitness activity. Health class teaches students to compare nutrition by reading food labels and playing Healthy Bingo. During break time, rather than sitting, students are encouraged to work out in the fitness center. Even during high school social events, healthy snacks are the norm.

“After school snacking” can be the hardest time to make healthy choices. As adolescents are growing and becoming more independent, controlling what they eat can be difficult. Guidance from our nursing department offers some quick tips regarding snacking.

1. Plan a list of healthy choices and prepare snacks ahead of time.
2. Place the snacks in individual clear bags, making them visible and most of all, convenient.
3. LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION. Put healthy snacks in the front of the refrigerator or cabinet.

For helpful resources visit [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org) or YouTube that has some fun videos addressing healthy eating.

# The Practice of Decision-Making



Susan Frost  
*Lead Social Worker, Young Adult Professional Learning Community*

Preparing for graduation from school is much more than ordering the cap and gown. In addition to building academic, communication, self care, and work skills, the young adult program at Wildwood School provides students who are 18-21 years of age with three years of ongoing practice in choice making, problem solving, and self-advocacy.

Our social workers help guide students in the essential outcomes that “students will be able to demonstrate self direction across multiple environments” and “develop awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses.” Encouraging students to identify and express their feelings and make choices for themselves comes with risk. Resisting the urge to prompt or direct a decision, the social workers allow students to make mistakes at times. As a result of these experiences, students learn how to evaluate outcomes as related to themselves and others. They assess the impact of their decisions as related to immediate results and long-term achievement of their personal goals. Through social stories, situational videos, role-plays, and group discussions, the students learn about decision making and taking responsibility. They discuss personal goal development and the balance of reliance on themselves rather than on others.

It’s a big step into the world of adulthood. There are many decisions to be made. In collaboration with classroom staff, work based learning staff, families, and transition coordinators, the social workers strive to empower the young adult students with confidence to be their own best advocate.

# School News

CLASSROOM 5 has been working on increasing independence during transition within the school environment. All of our students are now able to transition from the classroom to the library with little to no support.

CLASSROOM 13 has continued learning about different types of technology found in the classroom, in the building, at work and at home. The art club has begun to paint a mural for the high school wing. We hope to have it completed before our spring trip to Boston. In the workshop, we have prepared bags for the Garden Show at HVCC.

CLASSROOM 14 has been doing an excellent job reaching their individual goals and participating in community outings. The students have also been learning about how to cope with difficult situations and how to hold an appropriate conversation. During cross-classroom time, some students went to the Troy Children's Museum to learn about life cycles, energy and astronomy. We are excited for even more fun and educational activities throughout the rest of

the school year.

CLASSROOM 15 had a wonderful community lunch experience at Buca di Beppo in Colonie. The food was served family style and students and staff alike enjoyed sitting and dining together. We used funds from "Cheaper by the Dozen", our cupcake business to help pay for this experience. It was an amazing and successful trip and we thank you for making it possible by supporting Cheaper by the Dozen.

CLASSROOM 17 is continuing to engage in many functional activities. These include cooking and baking, budgeting, functional math and reading activities. Students continue to access the community for various job sites and field based learning and recreational activities.

The PHYSICAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT would like to thank Stephanie Mannarino for all her hard work and the great job she did during her time with the department and congratulate her on her new teaching position in classroom 12.

# Calendar of Events

APRIL 17 – FAMILY NIGHT AT CURRY RD.

APRIL 19 – HOOPS FOR HEART

APRIL 28 - WILDWOODSTOCK CONCERT - PARTING GLASS

APRIL 23 – SCHOOL CLOSED (STAFF DAY)

(CONTINGENT UPON NON-USE OF ALL SNOW DAYS)

MAY 15 – MARDI GRAS PARADE & CONCERT AT CURRY RD.

MAY 24 – SCHOOL CLOSED

(CONTINGENT UPON NON-USE OF ALL SNOW DAYS)

MAY 27 – MEMORIAL DAY – SCHOOL CLOSED

JUNE 5 – HALF DAY OF SCHOOL

JUNE 6 – HIGH SCHOOL SPRING TRIP TO BOSTON

JUNE 20 – YOUNG ADULT PROGRAM GRADUATION

JUNE 21 – LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

JULY 1 – FIRST DAY OF WILDWOOD SUMMER EXT. PROGRAM

JULY 4 – HOLIDAY – SCHOOL CLOSED

AUGUST 1 – OVERNIGHT AT ALTAMONT LOCATION

AUGUST 9 – LAST DAY OF WILDWOOD SUMMER EXT. PROGRAM

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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