

# Learning *For* Life

December 2012

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*Wildwood Programs is a non-profit,  
non-sectarian organization for the  
neurologically impaired, affiliated  
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Wildwood School

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## A Letter from the Director of Education



Cheryl Marcella  
Director of Education

Here it is again – holiday time and the days continue to race by. Life at Wildwood School moves fast these days not only because of the pace of our students but because of all the exciting things happening in our programs.

Our new professional learning communities at program levels and departments have really gelled. The result has been an efficient vehicle for our staff to communicate. Each program level is now speaking the same language and working off the same page as they share their classroom challenges and successes. This formal process of sharing expertise, information and experience has had a truly synergistic benefit for the students as the staff put their heads together to find the best practices for reaching our students.

We have developed essential outcomes for all students at program levels as a way to conceptualize what we want for each student to accomplish. Of course, all of our students are individuals and their uniqueness means each essential outcome will be tailored to their needs but the essential outcomes give the students, their families and the staff targets at which they can focus their aim. We have also developed common formative assessments. These brief assessments, often in the form of checklists and rubrics, provide us with a mechanism to assess each student's development on a regular basis. We will gather data from these assessments and share them with our professional learning communities to note what patterns are revealed, what seems to be working and what we all need to improve.

The action groups that we formed last year are also on task. Groups are focused on curriculum, technology, human resources, data, assessments, behavior support and professional development. These groups represent our major focus areas that we want to concentrate our continuous quality improvement efforts. None of these areas are more important than the development of the professional staff entrusted with the education and support of our students. We are working with every school staff member so that they can be highly qualified at what they do. The goal, like every goal we have, is centered on creating the very best learning environment for every single student at Wildwood School.

I remain very excited about how our programs are growing, evolving and continually improving. I hope you will enjoy hearing from our administrators on this issue as they let you know some of the specifics that their program levels are focused on and goals they are working toward.

## Elementary Program Level



Heather Quinn  
*Associate Director for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment - Program Coordinator for Instruction*

This year, we have a new model at the elementary level. There are four classrooms that are working within a professional learning community. In doing this, there is enhanced collaboration across classrooms. Staff working at the elementary level share a common vision. We have made a commitment to having small (6:1:3) classrooms that have a strong focus on skill acquisition, communication and positive behavior supports. A brand new exciting tool called the Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia (ACE) has been adopted. This internet resource develops learning profiles on each student and offers over 1,300 pieces of evidenced-based curriculum. It is a best practice guide for working with students with autism and other disabilities.

The staff uses the assessment tools provided for their students and the ACE suggests curriculum choices consistent with the learning scope and sequence of the student's needs. The system uses the principles of Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and it employs a systematic approach to teaching skills so that students can address challenges and build on existing successes. We are already seeing students grow in their ability to generalize their new skills in different situations and when they apply what they have learned, we are seeing more independent actions.

An exciting benefit of the ACE program is that all the classrooms are working on building the same skill sets in the same way and all the staff have the same expectations. This is vitally important as our students mature because they will be able to continue their gains by utilizing the developed skills at different levels as they progress through Wildwood School.

## Intermediate Program Level



Laura Shaefer  
*Program Coordinator for Instruction*

After 11 years working at Wildwood School as a speech and language therapist and special education teacher, I am thrilled at the opportunity to serve as the new Program Coordinator for Instruction at the intermediate level. It is amazing to me that after a short 10 weeks of school, our professional learning community has made such tremendous gains. I have been impressed by the collaborative efforts of our staff. Together, we have developed 10 essential outcomes that all students will be encouraged to master to their highest level of independence before transitioning to the high school level. These outcomes reflect necessary skills in the areas of safety, self-awareness, relationship building, health and hygiene. Our commitment to ensuring that our students reach their highest level of achievement is our first priority. We will accomplish this as a professional learning community by clearly defining the direction of our instruction and establishing a consistent curriculum across classrooms.

This sounds like an ambitious undertaking, right? It sure is, but we are up for the challenge! Our professional learning community has already developed formative assessments for each essential outcome that will support us in determining student skill acquisition. The data gathered by these assessments will help us to refine our instructional approaches and ensure student success.

We have begun curriculum mapping with the use of Rubicon Atlas. Atlas is a web based software system that allows our staff to facilitate the collaborative efforts of our PLC. It is a means by which we will clearly define the content being taught in our classrooms and the student learning objectives associated with our essential outcomes. It provides our teachers with a shared "space" to store and access resources. Curriculum mapping allows us the ability to define the direction of our instruction and prevents us from re-teaching learned skills. Mapping promotes adherence to the Common Core Learning Standards set forth by the state and it ensures cohesive continuity across classrooms.

Clearly, we are off to a great start to the school year. I have been impressed by the dedication that the staff has demonstrated throughout this process. Their devotion and enthusiasm has been contagious. I look forward to sharing the achievements of our students as we continue to develop our professional learning community.

### 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.

## High School Program Level



Stacey Jantzen  
*Program Coordinator for Instruction*

Wildwood High School program for students ages 15-18 has been embraced by our students, families and staff. We wanted to create a more cohesive identity for our program in which our students feel very proud. This is the first year that all of the high school classrooms are housed in the same location. The five high school classes are now located at our Curry Road site.

The high school has incorporated the Unique Learning Program's monthly themes as a best practice model for our classrooms. Each month, a specific point of focus is worked into the curriculum and incorporated into lesson plans and activities. Our latest theme involved the ecosystem and earlier this year we focused on citizenry and the voting process. The classrooms participated in a real life campaign and voting process having to do with something near and dear to their hearts – their annual spring trip. The experiential learning fortified the classroom work on our country's political system and democracy.

Our work-based learning efforts have been energized by our work training center where students acquire practical employment skills. It has been an exciting process with real-life applications for our students. Recently, the students got to do some work for a local Pizza Hut assembling boxes. It has not been all nose-to-the-grindstone for the high schoolers as they now have their very own high school lounge for group experiences and learning social skills outside of the classroom.

## Young Adult Program Level



Matthew Wright  
*Program Coordinator for Instruction*

New Site! New Staff! Transitions! OH MY!

That's right – All of these things have occurred in the Young Adult Program over the past few months. Our classrooms completed their consolidation at the Latham site, we have gained some new staff (myself included) and we are preparing 27 students for their transition into the community at the end of the year. Chaos, right? Not at all! The staff and students of YAP have done an amazing job adjusting to all of the changes. For those of you I have not yet met, my name is Matthew Wright

and I took over as Program Coordinator in late June. Prior to Wildwood, I spent the past 9 years working within the Guilderland Central School District and I am excited to be a part of Wildwood and the Young Adult Program.

This year, YAP will be working hard both in the classrooms and out in the community. Students will be working on skills in our training apartment and work training center to then put these skills to good use at home and in the community. Classrooms are getting out to Siena, Cook's Park and Afrim's for community PE. Work Based Learning has started an "employee" recognition program to highlight students who are working hard and demonstrating attributes that will help them succeed in the workplace.

Teachers, teaching assistants and related service providers are working together as a professional learning community on essential outcomes to better define what our students will need before they leave the Young Adult Program. Along with the essential outcomes, the professional learning community has developed formative assessments and will track progress to inform how best to deliver instruction to each student, maximizing their potential.

It is an exciting time to be at Wildwood and in the Young Adult Program. Sometimes change can be a good thing. It is looking like this is one of those times.

## Calendar of Events

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4 - HALF DAY OF SCHOOL

MONDAY - MONDAY, DECEMBER 24-31 - HOLIDAY RECESS

TUESDAY, JANUARY 1 - SCHOOL CLOSED - NEW YEAR'S DAY

TUESDAY, JANUARY 8 - HALF DAY OF SCHOOL

MONDAY, JANUARY 21 - SCHOOL CLOSED - MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

FRIDAY, JANUARY 25 - FAMILY FUN NIGHT

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5 - HALF DAY OF SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 8 - MARDI GRAS CELEBRATION WITH CAPTAIN SQUEEZE & THE ZYDECO MASHERS BAND CONCERT

MONDAY - FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18-22 - WINTER RECESS

# School News

## INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY MARK GIUFRE, SPECIALIST

It is very exciting to see classrooms embracing technology as part of their everyday teaching. The technology integration has been seamless in many classrooms. You cannot separate the teaching from technology – they just naturally go together. Teachers have been creating lessons on the Smartboard, using the iPads and other tools to present curricular materials and reach all learners. It is exciting to see!

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION RACHEL MCDERMOTT, TEACHER

The Physical Education Department is happy to announce a new partnership with Sage College's Physical Department Education students. On Thursday mornings, the PE majors will be observing our PE classes, regular classes and OT/PT services. With this partnership, we are hoping to expose and educate future teachers in the field of special education.

## SOCIAL WORK DEPARTMENT SUE FROST, LEAD SOCIAL WORKER FOR HIGH SCHOOL & YAP

The social work department held the first parent support breakfast on October 12<sup>th</sup> which was well attended at both the Curry Rd. and Latham sites. This is a time for parents and guardians to relax, meet other parents and share ideas. Please join us on December 14<sup>th</sup> for more of the same! Contact Sue Frost (640-3376) or Maureen Behuniak at (836-2230).

## NURSING DEPARTMENT KIMBERLY PERRINE, LEAD NURSE

Happy fall! It is the time of year in the nursing office when we work with our students to complete their annual school health screenings. The results of your student's height, weight, vision and scoliosis (if age appropriate) screenings will be sent home with your student as they are completed.

## CLASSROOM 3 MINDY PAULSEN. TEACHER

Classroom 3 has had a great start to the new school year! We are working hard on the ACE curriculum. We have also been learning about school rules, about ourselves and different habitats. The class has also been on community outings to a pumpkin patch, roller skating and a show at Proctor's in Schenectady

## CLASSROOM 11 JESSICA SUTHERLAND, TEACHER

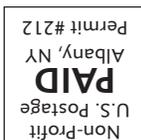
Classroom 11 has begun their pizza sale business. We also have taken several community trips to places like the apple orchard, Rollerama and Pizzeria Uno for a high school spring trip fundraiser. We participated in a high school wide vote for the spring trip and are very excited to go to the Boston Aquarium!

## CLASSROOM 14 KIMBERLY BRODERICK, TEACHER

The students in Classroom 14 have been very busy this school year. Our class hosted a fun and successful Pizzeria Uno fundraiser in October to raise money for our spring trip and gala. We have also been on many community outings including the Capitol in Albany, Indian Ladder and bowling for PE. The students will continue to develop social skills they apply in our classroom and in the community.

## CLASSROOM 17 CHRIS COYLE, TEACHER

We are coming off a very successful Monthly Munchies Sale Extravaganza at Curry Rd. that raised a lot of money for our charity. We are continuing to develop new job sites at which the students are very successful. We look forward to continued work on functional skills throughout the fall season!



A PUBLICATION OF:

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Wildwood Programs is a non-profit, non-sectarian organization for the neurologically impaired, affiliated with the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)

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