

Parents as Partners

St. Johns County School District—ESE Dept.

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Ponte Vedra High School Best Buddies Visit With PV/PV-Rawlings Elementary Students

On Tuesday, December 17th, four members of the Ponte Vedra High School Best Buddies International Club visited with students from Jennifer Nunes' Varying Exceptionalities K-5th grade classroom at PV/PV Rawlings Elementary School.

Brittany, Morgan, Chase and Lexi, along with Erika from Best Buddies International, participated in center and outside activities with the special needs students as part of their Best Buddies Program.

Morgan helped students conduct a science project called "Crystal Snowflakes" and rotated through activities in the sensory room.

Chase led a group of students in a game of Around the World outside on the school basketball court. Students enjoyed playing ball with a Ponte Vedra High School Athlete!

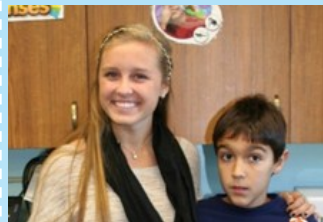
Brittany McGuire and Lexi Schur met with a group of students in the classroom and answered questions that they had about middle school, high school, friends and hobbies.

After each group completed their activities, the Best Buddies participants and the students met outside for some free play and swing time.

"The time and effort that each of the high school students, along with Rhonda Davis, Best Buddies Club Sponsor, donated to my students was so amazing. My students were looking forward to their visit, weeks before they were scheduled to come. They appreciated the time the older students spent talking with them, and assisting with their center and outside activities. In their eyes, they were visited by real-life leaders and athletes. Having the elementary-aged students interact with local high school students through activities builds disability awareness, student confidence and inclusion opportunities in our community," said Jennifer Nunes, ESE Teacher at PV/PV Rawlings Elementary School.

According to Best Buddies Sponsor, Rhonda Davis, Ponte Vedra High School ESE Teacher, "This is a win-win for both schools. The High School students get a tremendous amount of joy from getting to know the Elementary students and the Elementary students get someone to look up to. Best Buddies are looking forward to meeting with their new friends soon."

Contributed by: Jennifer Nunes, PV-PV Rawlings Elementary



St. Johns Technical High School Organic Garden

Mrs. Kurdyla's applied math students utilize concepts learned in class to cultivate an organic garden. Students work with a master gardener from the St. Augustine Agricultural Center to learn how to create and maintain seasonal produce. SJTHS students created a welcome basket for new Assistant Principal, Jennifer Gamble.



Contributed by: Cynthia Williams, Principal of SJTHS



Individualized Education Plans (I.E.P.'s) and YOU

Even though we try very hard to define all the acronyms that are so commonly used in relation to special education (IEP, IFSP, ESE, etc.), it can still be very confusing for a newcomer to step feet-first into this segment of the world.

It's likely that most of us didn't even know this segment of the world existed — until we were plunged into it without warning when our own child was diagnosed as having a disability.

Where it starts. Some children are born with a disability that is identifiable right away, but most children are diagnosed sometime later in their development, and it usually starts with someone noticing that the child is having difficulty. Maybe as an infant ("He should be able to sit up by now") or as a toddler ("She never interacts or plays with the other kids") or perhaps much later in school years ("He's having trouble reading").

Early Intervention. If a developmental difficulty is suspected while the child is still an infant (from birth to when they turn three), an evaluation process can determine whether or not the child would be eligible for services from Early Steps, the Early Intervention program here in Florida. If eligible, the family would participate in developing an Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) with the help of a Family Resource Specialist. This plan would identify services (such as physical therapy for example) and would be designed specifically for the child.

Early Transition. If a child has an IFSP in place when they turn three, they may transition at that time from an Early Intervention program to receiving services from a Public School.

The Law. There are federal laws that serve as guidelines to the states on providing education to children who have disabilities and special education needs. One set of laws is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act and is commonly known as IDEA. There are different sections of the law, for example, Part C of IDEA provides guidelines on the provision of services to infants and toddlers (Early Intervention) while Part B of IDEA is about the special education process once a child reaches age three.

Referral & Evaluation. If a child who is enrolled in public school is suspected of having a disability, an interested party can make a Referral, requesting that the child be Evaluated. The school must obtain a parent's consent (signature) before initiating an evaluation process on a child. The evaluation process will determine whether the child is eligible to receive services under IDEA.

The I.E.P. If the child is eligible for IDEA, an Individualized Education Program (or Plan), commonly known as an IEP is created specifically for the child. The IEP plan, according to the law, must be very detailed, so it is developed on a special (usually computerized) document so no one forgets to fill in any of the required information. The IEP document is then finalized at an IEP meeting.

The I.E.P. Meeting. Depending upon the circumstances, the number of people at an IEP Meeting might vary from as low as two to as high as ten or fifteen or even more. IEP Team Members might include teachers, therapists, and other school district personnel — and the parents of the child are always invited. IDEA makes it very clear that parent participation is crucial to the IEP process. As the people at the table who know the child best, the parents are extremely important members of the team. IEP Teams usually meet once a year, though they can meet more often if the team determines the necessity. A parent can request an IEP meeting at any time (request in writing).



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Upcoming Events

April 1, 2014—**Free CARD ABA Training**. This all day event features Dr. Timothy Vollmer teaching about ABA and the issues surrounding seclusion and restraint. Visit <http://www.healautismnow.org/event> for more information.

April 10, 2014—**CARD Spring Fling**. Visit the CARD Center for Easter Bunny photos, egg hunts, games, dancing and more. Event is from 5:30pm-8:00pm at their offices, 6271 St. Augustine Road, Suite 1, Jacksonville. For more information, call (904) 633-0750.

April 5, 2014—**The Flavor Run 5K—Ponte Vedra Beach**. The Jacksonville Area & the Town of Nocatee welcomes a unique new family event called The Flavor Run. The race is a whole new take on the popular colored powered runs. This new family fun 5K supports local communities and businesses through a unique experience that engages all the senses; sight, smell, touch, hearing and TASTE. Yes. FRUIT FLAVORED POWDER; blueberry, strawberry, watermelon, grape, banana, and orange. Visit www.flavorrun.com for more information.

April 10 2014—**Webinar: Empowering Parents and Students with High-Quality School Choice Options**. Florida offers a wide range of educational choices, including charter, magnet and virtual schools, home education and scholarship programs, as well as special programs in traditional public schools, to meet the needs of every child. Join the Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice at the Florida Department of Education to learn more about Florida's School Choice Programs! Visit <https://www1.gotomeeting.com/register/308360929> to register.

April 12, 2014—**Bowling Buddies** - Join Inclusion Solution at Beach Bowl on Beach Boulevard for four lanes of fun! Educators and therapists are on hand to facilitate social interaction. This is a great activity for children and teens with Autism, and the parents enjoy connecting with other families. Meet Mary and her team at 12:30 pm. Register in advance by emailing inclusionsolution@gmail.com.

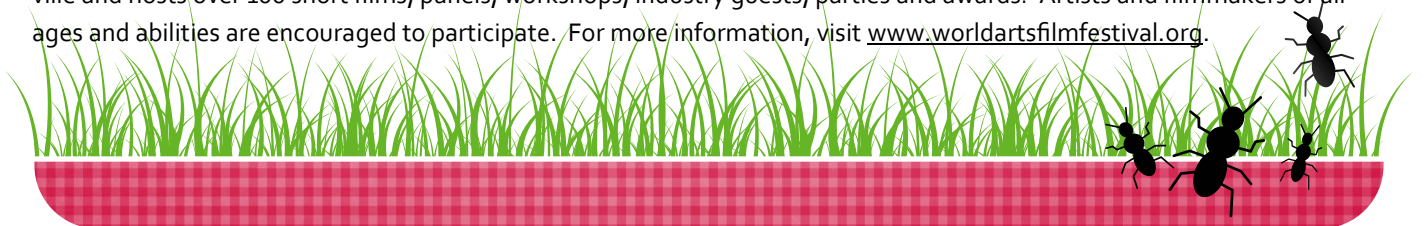
April 26, 2014—**Peer to Pier Fishing** - Fishing off the Jacksonville Beach Pier. To Register: Mary Erickson-Verdi at inclusionsolution@gmail.com or (904) 994-1005.

April 27, 2014—**The HEAL Zoo Walk for Autism at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens**! Register now! Join forces with HEAL for the First Coast Zoo Walk for Autism at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens. Mark Autism Awareness Month by joining old friends and making new ones for HEAL's annual Zoo Walk. Visit www.healautismnow.org for more information.

May 6-9, 2014—**VSA Festival at the Cummer Museum of Art and Gardens**. Volunteers are needed for this very special event in which 2,300 students with special needs will tour this museum and stop at the Art Stops along the way. Volunteers must arrive by 8:00 a.m. and the day ends at 1:30 p.m. There is a free lunch at the end of your volunteer shift. You will not regret volunteering for this moving event. Please contact the Cummer Museum for more information - (904) 355-0630.

May 13, 2014—**Gifted Parent Advisory Meeting**—3:30pm-4:30 pm—Julington Creek Elementary School, 2316 Racetrack Road, St. Johns, FL 32259..

May 15-17, 2014—**World Arts Film Festival**—This local film festival takes place at the Main Library in Downtown Jacksonville and hosts over 100 short films, panels, workshops, industry guests, parties and awards! Artists and filmmakers of all ages and abilities are encouraged to participate. For more information, visit www.worldartsfilmfestival.org.





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Mission Statement: To identify and meet the unique educational needs of exceptional students and to provide support and resources to enhance educational opportunities so they may become productive citizens.

ESE programs and services address the unique needs of students who are gifted in kindergarten through 12th grade and those with mild, moderate and severe disabilities from age three until they graduate with a regular diploma or until their 22nd birthday. ESE programs and services are designed to assist students in reaching their educational goals through the use of instructional and behavioral approaches which are research-based and exemplify best practices. Technology is used in many creative ways to meet student needs as well.

ESE services are available at all district schools for gifted students and students who have mild to moderate disabilities. Students with more significant disabilities are served in cluster programs at selected sites. Program support is provided to students, parents and school personnel by program specialists based at the district office. Students with disabilities who are not eligible for services through the ESE program, may be eligible for an accommodations plan under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE THIS NEWSLETTER ELECTRONICALLY?

We hope that you find this newsletter informative and useful. The next issue of the Parents as Partners Newsletter will be posted to the St. Johns County School District web site at www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/depts/academicservices/ese.

If you would like to receive a copy via email, please email your email address to sarah.coffin@stjohns.k12.fl.us and we will gladly add you to our Parent Newsletter Email List.