

December 2007 Advocacy Newsletter

Information gathered by the Education, Environment, Health and Wellness, Parent Involvement, Parenting and Family Life, Cyber Safety and Special Education Chairs to assist you in your advocacy efforts.



Education

- **Investing in Children's Mental Health:** The NYS Office of Mental Health's Child and Family Clinic-Plus initiative represents an opportunity for collaboration between schools and County Departments of Mental Health, and represents a way of assisting schools in addressing the significant number of students who struggle academically and behaviorally due to emotional/behavioral issues.
- **NYS Parent Education and Awareness Program of the NYS Office of Court Administration:** An initiative of Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye and Chaired by the Hon. Evelyn Frazee, a Supreme Court Justice in Rochester, this program offers parent education by certified providers to help separating or divorcing parents better understand the effects of their breakup on their children and to give them information and ideas about how to make the new family situation easier and more livable for themselves and their children. Check the website at: www.nycourts.gov/ip/parent-ed for a list of certified providers.
- **View Presentation:** by President DeWald and past president Leask on closing the gap: http://www.nysut.org/cps/rde/xchg/nysut/hs.xsl/endingthegap_8781.htm
- **Empowering Parents School Box:** The U.S. Department of Education released a tool kit to empower and support parents to be involved in their children's education. The tool kit provides information on No Child Left Behind and tips and tools parents can use to support learning at home and in school, as well as posters and brochures. For a free copy of the tool kit, call 1-877-4ED-PUBS or visit the website: <http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/involve/schoolbox/index.html>
- **New online tool aids literacy programs:** Schools, libraries, and other organizations that aim to improve students' reading skills have a new online tool to help them evaluate how well their literacy programs work: the Verizon Literacy Program Self-Assessment Tool. Developed by the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) with funding from the Verizon Foundation, the test is available free of charge to all literacy programs. <http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/showStoryts.cfm?ArticleID=7462>
- **New Website:** The U.S. Department of Education today launched a new Web site to provide teachers with recommendations on effective teaching practices and examples of possible ways to implement those practices to help promote excellence in American education and improve student achievement. The new "Doing What Works" site, <http://dww.ed.gov>, offers a user-friendly interface to quickly locate teaching practices that have been found effective by the department's research arm, the Institute of Education Sciences, and similar organizations. In addition, it cites examples of possible ways this research may be used to help students reach their academic potential.
- **Scores on Urban NAEP Inch Up:** Students in large urban districts made progress in reading and mathematics on the [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\)](#), with their strongest gains coming in math and from low-performing youths. While scores among students in large cities still lag well behind national averages, achievement rose in

4th- and 8th-grade math and among 4th graders in reading. Eighth grade scores in reading remained flat.

- **Guides on Sharing Information Released:** Education Secretary Margaret Spellings released what she called [user- friendly" guidelines](#) to help educators and parents interpret federal privacy laws in an initiative prompted by the mass shooting at Virginia Tech. The Education Department released three brochures on the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or FERPA: one for K-12 educators, one for colleges and one for parents.



Environment

- ✚ **ALERT:** TerraCycle Drain Maintainer and Cleaner is packaged in recycled plastic soda bottles. The product which is marketed as ecologically safe, when placed next to soda bottles, is difficult to distinguish from the soda product. For more information go to www.TerraCycle.net and www.msnbc.msn.com/id/21311855
- **January is Radon Action Month:** Radon emanates naturally from the ground all over the world, particularly in regions with soils containing granite or shale. Depending on how houses are built and ventilated, radon may accumulate in basements and dwellings. At standard temperature and pressure radon is a colorless, odorless, tasteless gas. It is the 2nd leading cause of lung cancer behind smoking and the predominant cause of lung cancer in non-smokers. About ½ of all US lands emit above average levels of radon and more than ½ of NYS lands (37 counties) also emit above average radon readings. This area covers the southern part of the state stretching from Buffalo to Albany and south to Orange and Putnam counties. Only the North Country, Westchester, NYC and Long Island have average to below average readings. To find out more about radon in your area and how to test your home levels, an informational radon brochure, “Protect your Family from Radon” is available on-line through the NYS Department of Health (www.health.state.ny.us) and a radon testing brochure, “A Citizen’s Guide to Radon” is available at the Environmental Protection Agency: www.epa.gov



Health and Wellness

- **Aqua Dots Beads Recalled:** The Consumer Product Safety Council issued the recall after children became unconscious after swallowing the beads. Once ingested, the beads released a chemical related to GHB, the banned date rape drug. More information on this recall and other toy safety can be found at: www.uspirg.org/issues/toy-safety
- **Children who do not get enough sleep, gain weight:** A new study done at the University of Michigan by Dr. Julie Lumeng, assistant research scientist at the Center for Human Growth and Development, has shown that children ages 9-12 were more likely to gain weight if they slept less than 9 hours a night. More information can be found at: <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/cgi/content/abstract/120/5/1020>
- **Share Your Thoughts About the State of School Wellness:** Action for Healthy Kids is conducting a national online survey to gather perspectives and opinions on the current state of school wellness. The 10-minute survey will allow respondents to highlight what is working for and against school wellness and identify what it will take to ensure adequate nutrition and physical activity for all children. The role of parents in shaping healthy learning environments is critical. To participate in the survey, click the link below or cut and paste it into your browser: <https://www.questionpro.com/akira/TakeSurvey?id=796719>



Cyber Safety

- **Choosing video games:** Parents needing assistance can check out the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB) at www.esrb.org.
- **Regulating game time:** Parents can check out www.pta.org. National PTA, Microsoft and Super Bowl champ Jerry Rice have joined forces to help kids manage their interactive media use. Parents can also go to www.xbox.com/isyourfamilyset
- **ID Theft:** For help in protecting yourself get tips from Card Cops and the FTC at www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17826208/. If you are a victim of ID theft click on Fact Finder next to the article for step by step assistance in reporting the theft and protecting yourself from further damage.



Special Education

- **Autism:** The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) suggests autism screening to allow earlier interventions. Two new clinical reports from AAP will help pediatricians and parents recognize autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) earlier and guide families to effective interventions. Many children are diagnosed around 18 months of age. If the diagnosis is made earlier, then interventions can be started sooner and this can make a difference in the child's prognosis. For more information: <http://www.aap.org/>
- **New Film:** Dan Habib, a photojournalist and father of a child with a disability, has made an extraordinary film (*Including Samuel*) about the inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all areas—home, school, work, and the community. In addition to meeting Dan's son, Samuel, viewers will also meet other children and adults who share a variety of experiences we can all learn from. Visit www.includingsamuel.com for more info.
- **New Connections for Overcoming Dyslexia:** Using new software developed to investigate how the brains of dyslexic children are organized, University of Washington researchers have found that key areas for language and working memory involved in reading are connected differently in dyslexics than in children who are good readers and spellers. However, once the children with dyslexia received a three-week instructional program, their patterns of functional brain connectivity normalized and were similar to those of good readers when deciding if sounds went with groups of letters in words. The findings could provide insight into the development of new teaching methods geared toward students who are dyslexic. <http://uwnews.washington.edu/ni/article.asp?articleID=36405>
- **The ALLIANCE Web site** features research-based information on special education and related topics for parents and professionals. The site includes a wide selection of news, publication, and resources, as well as a directory of the nation's Parent Centers. www.taalliance.org
- **Assistive Technology Center** gets high marks from students with disabilities. Ayetzi Nunez used to slog through her reading assignments the old-fashioned way, painstakingly studying page after page. "It was very difficult," recalls Nunez, a soft-spoken senior, majoring in Spanish linguistics, who suffers from a disability that makes reading extremely challenging. http://www.berkeley.edu/news/berkeleyan/2007/11/14_assistivetech.shtml
- **Microsoft word files to serve as talking books:** Microsoft and open-source site SourceForge will offer a free plug-in early next year that will convert Office 2007 files to the DAISY format that translates text to speech. The free tool will add a "Save as DAISY" option within Word 2007, 2003 and XP software. DAISY XML files can be "read" aloud by speech synthesizers, paired with audio narration and used to create electronic Braille. http://www.news.com/8301-10784_3-9815836-7.html?tag=nefd.blgs