LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

by Kathy Johnston

Welcome! We have had many changes this year in SESS and it is so exciting to see all of the moving pieces fitting together. We have new staff at all three levels. It is great seeing new faces, learning new strategies and sharing ideas.

This newsletter provides updates and information about new programs and ideas taking place across our district.

We continue to increase after school opportunities for our students and expand Best Buddies and Unified Sports. This continues to be a SESS initiative.

Annual Review season is here. That is a time each year to reflect on growth and look at best options. I hope you work closely with our staff to do this planning and help us to be partners in programing.

Finally, we are looking forward to the formation of a Parent Advisory Committee. Thank you to the families who are participating.

BC SPECIAL EDUCATION AND STUDENT SERVICES MISSION STATEMENT:

The mission of the Bethlehem Special Education and student services department is to serve all students in the least restrictive environment so we may prepare them to learn, grow and have a personal connection to their community. Our goal is to maximize student outcomes so each student may reach their fullest potential while fostering an inclusive culture within our school community.
NEW FACES AT SESS

Top Row (Left to Right)
Julian Santos    Sheila Jones    Megan Walston    Kim Herzl-Betz

Bottom Row (Left to Right)
Moria Mascelli    Ryan Keller    Aerial White    Amy Pierce
This fall, our intensive skills classrooms at the elementary level implemented a new curriculum. The Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia (ACE) was developed by expert staff at The New England Center for Children (NECC). NECC is a private, nonprofit autism research and education center dedicated to transforming the lives of children with autism worldwide through education, research, and technology, based out of Southborough, Massachusetts.

Based on nearly 40 years of curriculum development, research and implementation, the ACE includes assessment tools, customizable lesson plans, and data-based reporting systems.

ACE has been designed to provide teachers and related service providers with easy access to applied behavior analytic procedures and an effective and efficient way to understand student performance data. Every lesson plan within ACE can be customized to the learning profile of the individual student being taught. Lessons are tied to the common core standards so that students are still working on grade level standards, but at their own pace.

Since the implementation of this new curriculum, students have been thriving. Their progress is measured daily, and skills that may have been missed in the past are being taught and mastered. The quick pace of the programs and positive reinforcement built in only enhance our student’s progress.
**MOTOR IMPROVEMENT**

Bethlehem’s Occupational Therapy Motor Improvement program offers planned activities to foster crucial fine motor development. Students also engage in fun motor activities set to music to help strengthen their upper bodies.

This school year, the Occupational Therapists at Bethlehem have implemented a Motor Improvement Program for kindergarten students. The intended population for this program are students at risk for fine motor delays that could impact classroom performance.

We know that as children attend school they develop their minds and bodies through challenges and demands of the occupation of being students. Fine motor challenges confront the students daily. Fine motor development can enhance a student’s ability to participate in their learning process. By offering an environment that focuses on the developmental components of hand development and fine motor skills, a child can more easily acquire the complex skills of writing and drawing. By implementing carefully planned activities administered at developmentally appropriate times, a child can be better prepared for grasping a pencil, holding it correctly and forming letters with fluid movement and precision.
MAINSTREAMING AND INCLUSION AT THE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Participation in extracurricular activities is one of the hallmarks of life at the Middle School. There are a wide variety of clubs and sports that all students are encouraged to join. Something really does exist for everyone. Students with Disabilities have successfully joined after school clubs such as Best Buddies, Jr. Chef’s Club, and the Garden Club. They have danced across the stage in the musical or been selected for sports teams.

Students With Disabilities at the Middle School receive specialized programming, related services, modifications, and accommodations as outlined in their Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Some of these recommendations are woven into general education classes and some take place outside of the general education setting.

Providing students access to participation in classes and activities alongside their non-disabled peers is an important facet of life as a middle school student. The staff at the MS are often on the lookout for new opportunities as well as creative ways to support unique student needs in a variety of settings.

Academic opportunities include participation in general education classes, when the Committee on Special Education determines this is the Least Restrictive Setting for a student to receive their instruction. Students may be provided access through our Direct Consultant Teacher program with modifications. When the team determines that a student should be mainstreamed into a general education classroom from a Special Class setting, such as the Secondary Skills Program, that is also considered and planned for. Most of our students at the Middle School with an IEP or 504 Accommodation Plan are provided instruction alongside their peers in a seamless manner through our team approach to meeting student needs.
BEST BUDDIES

Our BCSD Best Buddies program has been reaching new heights this year. With over 100 students participating in the program they have a full house for every event.

This year students, with and without disabilities, have been creating and continuing their friendships through activities inside and outside of the school day. Our students have decorated the HS sidewalks with chalk drawings while getting to know each other and had fun pumpkin painting at Kleinkie’s Farm.

During the month of October, our Buddies had a great time at Homecoming and scooting around during scooter games. In November, we were thankful for our buddies vocal and dance abilities during a Karaoke/Dance Party activity, and had a rolling good time bowling. Before the holidays our students returned to the Delmar Atria Assisted Living Community to entertain the residence with holiday tunes and before the holiday break decorated and ate tons of homemade sugar cookies. Next up is our community walk in April!
UNIFIED PHYSICAL EDUCATION

What is Unified Physical Education? Unified Physical Education joins people with and without intellectual disabilities in the same class. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding.

Unified Physical Education is an opportunity for students of varying ability levels and backgrounds to come together on equal terms through ongoing fitness, sports, leadership and wellness activities. This course focuses on the physical, intellectual and social growth of all participants.

Here at BC we have combined Ms. Blanchard’s Adapted Physical Education class with 17 students who have volunteered to participate in this program with Mrs. Ciavardoni. Together, we have worked through dance, volleyball, bowling, and project adventure curriculum. Upcoming units include; cardio drumming, basketball and yoga.

We are amazed at the relationships that have begun to grow in our school community between all of our students. We are proud of each and every student’s growth and achievement in this program so far.
PAPER PASTRIES
by Paula DiBiase

Paper Pastries is run by staff and Special Education students in the LEAD (Linking Education and Development) program. The card shop provides experience in the world of work, practice of “real world” academic skills and practice of listening & speaking skills.

Bethlehem High School’s first-ever card shop, Paper Pastries, officially opened for business in 2019. In the week leading up to Valentine’s Day, the business had their first successful “soft opening” and sold out of all Valentine cards that they had made!

This momentum launched the business into the creation of “everyday” cards as well. Colorful cards with birthday wishes and many “thinking-of-you” sentiments like “You rock” and “Consider yourself hugged” line the display racks. The cards are $1 each or three for $2.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for Paper Pastries was held March of 2019 with the support of staff including BCHS Principal Dave Doemel, Superintendent Jody Monroe and Director of Special Education and Student Services Kathy Johnston. Principal Doemel cut the ceremonial ribbon just before the shop began serving customers.

During the holiday season the business took a spot in the Delmar Farmer’s Market. Over the course of 2 Saturdays, the students were able to sell a variety of holiday cards, gift card holders, gift tags and confetti. Plans are being considered for a monthly visit to the Farmer’s Market when it reopens in May.
The 2019-2020 school year is the second year of the College Transition Program, a partnership between Bethlehem Central School District and The College of St. Rose. This program allows students to audit college classes, practice employment skills both on campus and in the Pine Hills neighborhood, participate in student events, receive tutoring from Education Majors, and socialize with same age peers.

This year we have added a few new students and staff to our program, and expanded our presence in the community and on campus. We have acquired new job sites to include local businesses and volunteer sites such as Pet Supplies Plus and St. Vincent’s Food Bank.

We have also partnered with other local college and transition aged programs through Niskayuna Central School District and South Colonie School District; we have enjoyed several field trips with their students and staff. Some of the highlights of the first half of our year have included Best Buddies events such as: Zumbuddies, laser tag and holiday parties. Students have attended field trips to the Niskayuna Transition Program at Schenectady Community College, Siena College, the Empire State Plaza, and Corning Tower just to name a few.

Our students have taught classes at the St. Rose Pre-School, fundraised for the Regional Food Bank and practiced their travel training skills on the CDTA bus lines. We continue to hope to grow our program and become even more of a part of the St. Rose and Pine Hills Albany community.