

**Minutes of the Needham Special Education Parents Advisory Council**  
**Meeting of May 11, 2009**  
**Broadmeadow Elementary School**  
**Needham, MA 02492**

**I. Announcements – Tee Stock and Maureen Callahan, Co-Chairs Needham SEPAC**

- On Monday, May 18, at 7:30 pm, the SEPAC liaisons will meet at Maureen Callahan's home (67 Bradford Street, Needham). Please contact your [liaison](#) if you have questions, issues, or compliments that you would like brought to the attention of the SEPAC board and school administration.
- On Thursday, May 21 at 10:00 am in the Needham High School Media Center Classroom, Eileen Hagerly will present *The Parents' and Students' Rights* training session.
- On Monday, June 8 at 7:00 pm here at Broadmeadow Elementary School, we will host a panel discussion, *Dealing with the Emotional Stresses of Parenting a Special Needs Child*. Panelists will include parents of Middle School and High School Students with special needs, as well as Licensed Clinical Psychologist [Dena Ray](#). At the June meeting, we will also hold elections for next year's board positions.
- On Tuesday, June 9 at 9:15 am, join us for a parent coffee at Panera Bread.
- We rely on input from you to plan our program topics and speakers. This year Sandy Cisternelli distributed a programming survey to get input. To date we have received 31 responses. If you haven't already, please take a few minutes to complete the [survey](#) at to ensure that we bring in speakers to address topics that are important to you.
- We need volunteers for next year. We are distributing a sign up sheet. There is a range of opportunities available, from providing snacks at meetings to board positions. Please sign up.

**II. Presentation – Forming Friendships: How to Facilitate Peer Interactions**

Maureen Callahan introduced the speakers:

- Arleen Schwartz, M.Ed, Floortime Practitioner, and founder of *See My Friends*, in Newton, MA, facilitates small, semi-structured play groups for children, ages 3-7 experiencing difficulties in self-regulation, play and social interactions.
- Cari Feingold, M.S. OTR/L and Lori Hodgins Brazell, M.S. Founders and Directors of [Adventures Outside the Box](#), LLC in Newton, MA.

Ms. Schwartz presented first as she works with younger children. She does not have a website, but can be reached at 617-877-2099 or [Aschwa781@aol.com](mailto:Aschwa781@aol.com). Ms. Schwartz described her social groups, which

are based on [DIR Floortime](#) developed by [Stanley Greenspan M.D.](#) and Serena Weider PhD. DIR is an acronym for Developmental, Individual-Difference, Relationship-based. Ms. Schwartz works with children who have IEPs, children who have specific diagnoses, and children who do not have diagnoses or IEPs, but who are struggling socially. Her playgroups are open-ended with six and eight week sessions. Her playgroups are not covered by insurance.

Ms. Schwartz works with parents and families as much as possible to help children generalize social skills beyond their social groups. She also suggested [The Astra Foundation](#) in Acton, MA as a resource.

Ms. Schwartz's [presentation](#) is available to view.

Ms. Feingold and Ms. Brazell of *Adventures Outside the Box* presented next. They work with children and teens from kindergarten through grade 11 who present with Asperger Syndrome, Nonverbal Learning Disability and related disorders. They offer small group interactions in ten week cycles, monthly "try it" weekend adventures for middle school students, and individual social thinking opportunities.

Ms. Feingold and Ms. Brazell model their groups on "[social thinking](#)" developed by Michelle Garcia Winner. They emphasize the thought processes behind social skills and focus on a core set of vocabulary. Depending on the study, research shows that 85-93% of communication is nonverbal, so Ms. Feingold and Ms. Brazell emphasize nonverbal communication skills.

In order to set up an activity for social interaction, Ms. Feingold and Ms. Brazell recommend:

- Choosing a simple activity, so the focus is on the social interaction.
- Setting up the activity so that every child can complete it competently.
- Making jobs contingent on interaction (e.g. each child must seek out every other child in the group to get one of the components to complete the activity).
- Keeping the activity short so it goes well. This helps kids build up positive memories of themselves.

One parent asked, "If your child is in a social group, how can parents get feedback?" Ms. Feingold and Ms. Brazell responded:

- We send an email after each group meeting.
- We host regular parent coffees.
- We adjust communication depending on the level of parent need.
- As a parent, you should know what language is being used with your child's group, so ask.

Another parent asked about working with Middle School students on nonverbal communication. Ms. Feingold and Ms. Brazell responded:

- First, put it on the table. Explain that nonverbal communication exists. They worked with one

group of students who did not believe there is such a thing as nonverbal communication.

- Demonstrate. Stop talking in the middle of a sentence. People do not expect it.
- Make sure to use nonverbal communication even when others do not. It's natural to shut down your own nonverbal communication, but you must use it to model it.

Ms. Feingold's and Ms. Brazell's complete presentation will be available to view at [needhamsepac.org](http://needhamsepac.org)

Respectfully Submitted by  
Kori Rogers