

Merrimack Special Education Support Group
Monthly meeting
February 17, 2009
Location: Merrimack High School, Room 202

Meeting began at 7:00 pm. 5 people were present at the beginning of the meeting.

Topic 1: Review of “Including Samuel” presentation

MSESG, in conjunction with the school district, hosted a showing of the film “Including Samuel” on February 12, 2009. About 35 people attended, mostly education professionals but also some parents, and some Rivier College students. The discussion panel included David St. Jean, Director of Special Education for the Merrimack School District; Kim Yarlott, Assistant Principal of Reeds Ferry Elementary School, who happened to be at the school in Concord where Samuel Habib – the subject of the documentary – attended classes in the film; and Curtis Glover, a student at Merrimack High School who does public speaking about being an autistic person.

Topic 2: our next event

Barbara Publicover said she hopes the group can hold one more event before the end of the school year. The district committed to assisting with 4 initiatives during the year. Along with the “Including Samuel” presentation, the other two that have happened this year were the uploading of the links from the MSESG website onto the Merrimack School District website; and permitting MSESG members to display a **Disability Awareness kit in the school lobbies** during the fall parent-teacher conferences.

[Attendee] mentioned that home schoolers feel left out of the opportunities for support and service in the district. She said she is starting a “kitchen table” support group at which parents who are providing home schooling can discuss needs and concerns in an informal setting and share ideas.

At last month’s meeting, the question had been raised about the, the idea being that we may be better able to target unmet needs in the community if we have a sense of which needs are most prevalent. B. Publicover presented the statistical breakdown of the coding of special education students in Merrimack, which is included in the school district’s annual report. Of the more than 850 special education students in the district, the largest group is “learning disabilities,” followed by “other health impairments” and then “speech and language.”

[Attendee] proposed doing something on speech, as it would hit a large number of families and may help overcome the reluctance of some families to participate in our group because of the potential stigma of having their child identified as “special need.” [Attendee] suggested something on early reading and literacy. [Attendee] suggested something on the topic of Everyday Math.

Topic 3: Getting the word out

B. Publicover said the new state regulations are now up on the MSESG website. She noted that she included an explanatory paragraph with most of the links on our website because, in her experience, many sites offer links but do not explain why they are valuable or to whom they may be relevant. [Attendee] noted that there is no link from the school district website to the MSESG website.

B. Publicover said there has been discussion about the possibility of having the school district mail our brochure to every family whose children have an IEP in the Merrimack School District. [Attendee] mentioned the Get Set program, and suggested they could do the printing of the brochures. B. Publicover said the district could be made anonymous, in other words the return address becomes ours, the brochure is ours, and the school only provides the address labels.

[Attendee] said we could sponsor an event in the community as a way to advertise our existence to a broader audience. She suggested a readathon of some sort. She also suggested having reporter Wendy Thomas do an article in the Nashua Telegraph about us. Other avenues suggested for promotion of our group include pediatricians' offices, churches, private kindergartens and daycares.

Topic 4: medical information

Attendees discussed the disconnect between the medical and educational parts of managing children's disabilities. [Attendee] said the sped coordinators often get information about the children's medications and diagnoses, but it can be very helpful to pick up the phone and call the doctors. B. Publicover said they could have someone come in to talk about the various medications.

Someone mentioned the possibility of holding a wellness night. A local Chiropractor works with several special needs families.

B. Publicover said she will work on organizing a literacy/reading event, and [attendees] will organize a wellness event.