



ARHS Parent Center Newsletter



Volume 8 Issue 3

February 2008



Update From the ARHS Parent Center

The Amherst Regional High School Parent Center held its most recent meeting on January 16, 2008. The major part of our meeting was devoted to a presentation by Assistant Dean Annie Leonard and co-director of Academic and Support Programs, Nate May. Together, they provided a wide-ranging and informative description of the many ways in which Academic and Support Programs provide services to a number of Amherst students and their families.

In summary, here is what they outlined for the Parent Center:

- Currently ARHS has 233 students who receive specialized services through Special Education. Of the 233, 31% are designated as "high need" based on the intensity of service they receive. The Special Education staff includes 15 special education teachers and 29 educational support staff (paraprofessionals).
- Students in Special Education work toward their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals, and toward graduation in the least restrictive possible settings.
- The HS supports inclusion of all students.
- Programs:
 - o Academic Skills (AS). 103 students. Mainly health or learning disorders.
 - o Academic Individualized Mainstream Support (AIMS). 12 students. Supports inclusion of students with Aspergers and slight autism, i.e. high functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders.
 - o Student Support Program (SSP). 17 students. To assist students in developing effective coping mechanisms and problem solving strategies. Often manifest as anxiety, and includes those with depression, bipolar.

Next Parent Center Meeting February 13, 2008

The next meeting of the Amherst Regional High School Parent Center will be on Wednesday, February 13, 2008 at 7:00pm and will feature a presentation by Cindy Boyle on Internet safety, to be held in the ARHS library.

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- o Integrated Language Program (ILP). 17 students. For 9th and 10th grade students with communication disorders.
- o Center for Diverse Learners (CDL). 11 students. Students tend to have intellectual impairments, sometimes more severe communication disorders than those in ILP.
- o Developmental and Vocational Studies Programs (DS). 9 students. Most restrictive program held on the ARHS main campus. Many have physical or motor disorders, greater intellectual impairments, or more severe communication disorders. Primary skills instruction, Major focus is transition to whatever is next for the student after HS.

....continued on page 2

The mission of the Parent Center is primarily to be a helpful link between parents and ARHS.

Please contact us with your questions or concerns:

www.arhsparentcenter.org/contact

continued from page 1....

o Specialized services. ARHS has (not all of these staff are full-time):

- Speech and language pathologist
- Occupational therapist
- Physical therapist
- School psychologists
- Educational diagnostician
- Autism and Aspergers specialist
- Vocational coordinator

o South Amherst Campus (S.A.C.). 29 students. To re-engage students who have

experienced repeated setbacks in more traditional academic settings.

o East Street Alternative High School (E.S.A.H.). 19 students, may include overlap

with S.A.C. Students who have social, emotional or behavioral challenges.

Principal Mark Jackson reviewed some of the latest discussions concerning the evolving budget for 2008-2009.

- Actual deficit is still in flux. As of the meeting it was projected to be around \$300,000 for the Region, \$150,000 of which will apply to the ARHS.
- The School Committee voted to approve the newly designed Natural Science (Ecology and Environmental Science) requirement.

Mary Jo Maffei, who is coordinating the effort to promote greater use of after school academic support services, described the next steps in this initiative:

- Program to publicize the tutorial program to the students.
- Will have a contest for best "advertisement" of the program.

Homework, Academic Help What to do? Where to go?

School has started and your child seems to be doing fine. However, six weeks into the semester your child comes to you asking for help with science homework. You would love to help, but you don't understand the material either. In another case your child comes home saying that she failed her history quiz. What should you do? It is important to act soon and not wait until problems progress further. The following are steps that you can take to help your child academically.

Communicate with the teacher

The first step is to email or leave a voice mail for your child's teacher. Teachers will respond within 48 hours. Often just voicing your concerns and providing information on how your child learns best will make a difference. The school administrators encourage parents to communicate with their child's teacher. Teachers stay after school until at least 3 pm each day and are usually available to help students. However, since teachers sometimes have staff meetings or other commitments it is best to check ahead.

Encourage your child to setup a study group with other students

Ask teachers about the possibility of using class time for setting up study groups so that students can exchange contact information and determine a time to meet. Some teachers encourage study groups and give extra credit to students that participate in them.

Contact your child's guidance counselor

This is especially important if your child is in danger of failing, having trouble in more than one course or not "clicking" with or understanding a particular teacher. The guidance counselor can set up a case conference with you, the teacher, and your child and facilitate a discussion to address the particular learning style of your child. The counselor can also direct you to other academic support resources. If your child is on an IEP,

your child's liaison should be contacted instead of the counselor.

Use extra help resources available through the school

Math/ Science and English Study Center This resource is available during the day in Rooms 133 and 135 and is staffed by a paraprofessional and student tutors. Students can get a pass to go to these centers for help during study halls and lunches.

After School Study Center Tutor A tutor is available to the library Monday through Thursday until 4 PM to help students.

College Student Tutors On Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, students from UMass and Amherst College are in the library after school until 4 pm to provide help with most subjects. High School students do not need an appointment, but can just drop in and ask for help.

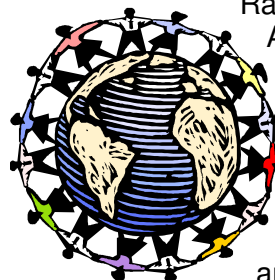
Tutor Book The guidance department maintains a book of available tutors by subject area. Each tutor submits a resume and passes a CORI check. These tutors charge a fee and must be contacted directly.

Prep Academy This program is for 9th graders that have been identified as needing extra support. Contact your child's guidance counselor for more information.

Project Challenge This mentoring program is for sophomores and juniors who are interested in challenging themselves by taking more rigorous course work. Participating students meet one period a day all year with their mentor and a small group of peers to work on class assignments and developing strategies and skills for achieving academic success. Students enroll in this program for the next year. Contact your guidance counselor for more information

A late bus is available on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday at approximately 3:45 p.m. to take students home. It services all of the towns in the regional school district.

RaDAR (Race and Discipline, Action, Rights)



RaDAR is a joint project of the ARHS PARENT CENTER and STUDY CIRCLES. It was organized in the spring, 2005 to address concerns raised by ALANA (African, African-American, Latino, Asian and Asian-American and

Native American) parents/guardians regarding issues of discipline, social justice and equity in education at ARHS.

On-going Projects

RaDAR has made recommendations for policies in the ARHS Student Handbook to better ensure respectful, fair and equitable treatment regarding discipline and related matters. RaDAR has supported students and their parents who sought remedies for unequal treatment in selection to Honor Society, in staffing for cheer leading squads, and in offenses meted out for discipline. RaDAR is launching a dialogue focused on the data compiled by the school staff regarding internal and external suspensions. RaDAR has also created the Norma Jean Anderson Civil Rights and Academic Achievement Award to honor and applaud a current ARHS teacher, administrator or staff member who promotes the ideals of a just and respectful community built on compassionate relationships.

In all of these efforts, the VISION of RaDAR is to work in a collaborative effort of students, teachers, staff and administrators toward a school free of racism, prejudice and discrimination that promotes personal safety, personal growth and academic achievement. We envision learning communities that nurture the ideals of a just and a respectful community where students in Amherst can obtain excellent education and achieve the highest academic success in an environment free of systematic privilege based on race.

Contacts

RaDAR welcomes new participants who share the Mission and Vision (as stated above). For

further information about meeting date, time and place, contact Annie Leonard, Asst Principle, ARHS; Kathleen Anderson, School Committee Member; or Jackie Wolf, Community Member (549-2958).

SAFE HOMES Update

We are pleased to announce that many families have signed up for the SAFE HOMES Program and that the SAFE HOMES Directory will be mailed sometime in January to those families who have signed on.

For information on SAFE HOMES go to : www.arhsparentcenter.org/Safe-Homes-Program

Thanks again to all of you who have joined the program.

Adrienne Levine

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Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Special Education Parent Advisory Councils (SEPAcs) are a requirement of the Massachusetts Special Education Regulations. Each school district is required to have a Parent Advisory Council on Special Education. We are a system-wide organization of Amherst, Pelham, and

Amherst Regional parents/guardians of school aged children (preschool -grade 12) with disabilities and other interested individuals. We work in partnership with our schools and administration to promote an innovative educational environment where children with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities and that our schools are safe, nurturing, challenging learning environments for ALL children.

We assist schools and families in reducing the frustrations that parents can experience when they first stumble into special education, by providing informational handouts, educational workshops, and informal discussion meetings to focus on continually improving educational opportunities to our children. As a SEPAC, we

can network resources and provide assistance to other parents in accessing information about the special education process.

For more information Check out our website at: www.arps.org/sepac/ To receive our E-Newsletter, Highlights in Special Education, send us an email to arpssepac@arps.org

Amherst Education Foundation

The Amherst Education Foundation, Inc. is an independent, non-profit education fund, whose purpose is to stimulate excellence, promote equity, enhance diversity, and mobilize broad community support for the public schools of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham, and Shutesbury.

To learn more:

www.amhersteducationfoundation.org

ARHS Information

Don't forget to check the ARHS school web site, which has lots of information on it, including announcements, directory and calendar:

www.arps.org/hs/

Link to daily announcements:

www.arps.org/hs/News/announcements.html

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Amherst, MA 01002

Main: (413) 362-1700
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CEEB/ACT Code: 220-015
School Cancellation Line: 362-1898
Athletic Events Cancellation Line: 362-1798

Amherst Regional School System:
www.arps.org/

Please check the ARHS online calendar for the latest information.

Link to the ARHS online calendar:
<http://www.arps.org/HS/Calender>