

## The inclusion issue

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## Our mission

To help people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder (ASD)



# The Sun

Newsletter

April-June 2015

## Defining “inclusion” in the classroom

To define “inclusion” in the classroom, Autism Delaware turned to the federal standard, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Commonly known as IDEA, this federal statute was passed in 1975 as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, later renamed, and reauthorized in 2004.

In our research, we found that, “because federal statutes do not use the term ‘inclusion,’ the Department of Education [DOE] has not defined that term” ([wrightslaw.com/info/lre\\_faqs\\_inclusion.htm](http://wrightslaw.com/info/lre_faqs_inclusion.htm)). In other words, the DOE does not use the word “inclusion” to define an inclusive classroom. Instead, the DOE looks at IDEA’s guarantee of a free, appropriate public education (or FAPE). And the FAPE environment is “...the least restrictive environment [LRE]; the very least restrictive environment is the general education classroom” ([specialeducationguide.com/pre-k-12/inclusion/whats-inclusion-theory-and-practice](http://specialeducationguide.com/pre-k-12/inclusion/whats-inclusion-theory-and-practice)).

“True,” notes Autism Delaware family service coordinator Dafne Carrnight, MS, LPCMH, “the very least restrictive is obviously the general-ed classroom, but that doesn’t mean this is the best LRE for a particular child. IDEA defines the FAPE environment as the LRE for each particular child.”

To determine the best LRE environment for a child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), we go to the child’s individualized education program (or IEP). There, special education is defined as “specially designed instruction.” Whether it takes place in a general-education or special-education classroom, the student’s specific areas of weakness must be met in

the lesson plan ([education.com/reference/article/special-education1](http://education.com/reference/article/special-education1)).

### The lesson plan

Since the Delaware DOE adopted the nationally known Common Core State Standards, a teacher’s lesson plan has included grade-level content standards as “indicators of what your child is expected to reach [or know] by the completion of his [or] her grade” ([education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_State\\_Delaware](http://education.com/reference/article/Ref_State_Delaware)).

Applying the new standards meant making them accessible to all Delaware students. Plus, special educators needed the tools for finding a balance between teaching academics and life skills.

“Inclusion begins with access to the general-education curriculum, so each child should be taught with the same over-arching standard as in the gen-ed classroom. As we move toward more inclusive practices, different levels of inclusion should be considered,” states Judi MacBride, training coordinator and family liaison at the University of Delaware’s Center for Disabilities Studies (the Center).

Working with teams of Delaware educators, families, and community members, MacBride helped develop grade band extensions (or GBEs) for the Delaware

**The Common Core State Standards can be found online at [corestandards.org/what-parents-should-know](http://corestandards.org/what-parents-should-know).**

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**The Sun**

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**An inclusive definition of “inclusion”**

Inclusion is a hot topic in the autism community. Talking about it, you discover that the word has many different meanings for many different people.

As a word person, I looked up “inclusion” in *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Fifth Edition)* and found “the act of including” and “the state of being included”—definitions that are not very helpful.

However, just below is the word “inclusive.” The first definition reads “Taking a great deal or everything within its scope; comprehensive.” The second reads “Including the specified extremes or limits as well as the area between them.”

To me, these sound like the definition of autism across the spectrum.

These definitions also reflect the way services are needed in the community—comprehensively and including all. Whether in the classroom, on the job, or on a playing field, all of our lives are richer and fuller when everyone is included, our individual needs

are met, and our individual talents are recognized.

Given this inclusive scope for “inclusion,” covering it adequately in one issue of *The Sun* would be impossible. So, we began by looking at its current fit in a recreational outlet, the classroom, and across the lifespan.

We also talked to two young adults about being peer partners. The Parent2Parent submission broadened our scope by depicting a child’s extra-curricular experience with neuro-typical children. And we asked representatives in the autism community to define inclusion, too.



**Teresa Avery**  
Executive Director

We’d also like to hear your definition. Your experiences and feedback help determine the scope of Autism Delaware’s work. So stay in touch at delautism@delautism.org. And don’t forget to send us your definition of “inclusion.”

**Diversity is the mix and inclusion is making the mix work. More formally, diversity is the composition of individuals in a group. Inclusion is the requisite programs and organizational strategies that welcome and embrace the strengths each person brings to the mix.**

**—Wake Forest University**  
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**A service of Autism Delaware**



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# Meeting the needs of all children

Meeting the social and emotional needs of all children is the goal of a statewide initiative called the Delaware Positive Behavior Support Project. Known as the DE-PBS Project, for short, the program helps teachers develop positive learning environments and build their knowledge and skills regarding positive behavior support (PBS) while preventing behavior problems in the classroom. DE-PBS is a collaborative effort of the Delaware Department of Education, the University of Delaware Center for Disabilities Studies, and Delaware public schools.

The DE-PBS Project’s vision is “to create safe and caring learning environments that promote the social-emotional and academic development of all children” ([wordpress.oet.udel.edu/pbs](http://wordpress.oet.udel.edu/pbs)). Using both universal and specially designed strategies, PBS takes a three-tiered approach to helping schools create a comprehensive system of support for all students. At tier one, the focus is on school-wide activities that support creating an overall positive school climate. Tier two includes group

interventions or additional classroom supports for students who require additional support to be successful. And at tier three, support plans are developed for students who require individualized attention.

“Currently, 137 schools are voluntarily active with the project,” notes DE-PBS Project program coordinator Sarah Hearn. “Active status means the school teams have been trained in school-wide PBS, but it is important to note that their level of implementation varies across the three tiers.” Recently, the DE-PBS Project expanded its efforts around tiers two and three to include additional training and support related to social skills and individualized education program (IEP) development for social and behavioral goals.

### In the classroom

An instructional coach with the DE-PBS Project, Susan Veenema, MEd, provides professional development and technical assistance to educators in the areas of tier three behavior

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## Defining “inclusion” in the classroom Continued from page 1

Content Standards. A GBE provides an access point to the content standards at each grade level, and a grade band comprises three or more grades, such as kindergarten to second grade (K–2), third to fifth (3–5), sixth to eighth (6–8), and high school (HS). This setup fell into place naturally as the teams realized that similar material was being covered in these grade bands.

**Training sessions on grade band extensions (GBEs) and access to the general-education curriculum are available to families. To set up an appointment, contact Judi MacBride at (302) 831-1052 or at [judim@udel.edu](mailto:judim@udel.edu).**

For each content standard, the teams created a basic descriptor of the subject material called an “essence.” And under each essence, three levels were created so the

teacher could provide standards-based instruction according to a student’s level of need. GBEs are available for mathematics, English language arts, social studies, and science.

The Center created the GBEs as part of an initiative called Adapting Curriculum and Classroom Environments for Student Success (or the ACCESS project, for short). Designed for

**The ACCESS website: [deaccessproject.org](http://deaccessproject.org).**

educators and families, the tools include adapting classroom materials, linking GBEs to the school district’s curriculum, teaching strategies, and individual consultation as well as lesson planning,

all aimed at improving the educational outcomes for Delaware students with significant intellectual disabilities.

ACCESS instructional coach Esley Newton notes that today’s teachers must also be able to make the classroom material meaningful for a wide range of students. And students must be able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills as they relate to the Delaware Content Standards GBEs. The goal is balance between instruction in academics and life skills.

“When I was in the classroom,” says Newton, “I wished I had a guide as a basis. I would often lose sleep wondering ‘How can I challenge my students once they master a skill? What would make sense?’ The GBEs assist you in this process.

“As an instructional coach,” continues Newton, “I help teachers with unit and lesson plan development. We train mostly dual-certified or special-ed teachers, but we’re available to all teachers.

“The teachers I’ve worked with have responded in a number of ways. Mostly, they go from ‘No way!’ at the start to a very pleased ‘Oh, my gosh!’” smiles Newton.

“We don’t push the GBEs as a mandatory requirement,” adds MacBride. “Instead, we think it’s just the right thing to do. We’re firm adherents in the quote from the inclusive education consultant, Cheryl Jorgensen: ‘Make the least dangerous assumption that all students can learn.’”



**ACCESS graduate assistant Anna Rutledge creates an adapted schedule for a student.**

# PARENT PARENT Written by parents for parents

## Embracing the different

My daughter has always been “different.” At first, nothing was obvious. I had only a nagging sense that she was not like the other kids, a quality of “otherness” that I found difficult to explain to her pediatrician. My wife and I continued to feel this way until Kerrienne, at around nine years old, was diagnosed with Asperger’s syndrome. With this medical diagnosis, things began to make sense.

Despite the medical diagnosis, Kerrienne didn’t meet the requirements for an educational classification at school, so she was not considered for an IEP (individualized

education program). However, the school did make educational accommodations through a 504 plan. My daughter continued to “sink or swim” with the neuro-typical children, sometimes with wide, anxious eyes, but now she wore a life vest.

Through trial and error and a lot of help, Kerrienne has learned to make “being different” work for her. Today, all of her sixth-grade classes are honors courses. My daughter is an A student! Plus, she works on the

school newspaper, volunteers at her old elementary school, and acts as a Junior Achievement young ambassador. As a Girl Scout junior, she earned the bronze award by organizing the First Annual Children’s Art Gala to benefit children with special needs at the Mary Campbell Center. (She’s planning the second one for May.) The bronze award is difficult to earn; it is the highest award that a Girl Scout can earn at the junior level. In 2014, she was named a Mid-Atlantic safety patrol of the year.

Until last year (when we moved to Delaware), every extracurricular activity that Kerrienne participated in was designed for neuro-typical children. What we learned through this process is that most people want to allow your child the opportunity to be successful in her extracurricular activities. Most children will adapt to the participation of a child who’s different. The key is communication and confidence. So, at home, we prepare our daughter for things that may happen in a new situation by role-playing. For a situation in which she may feel threatened or uncomfortable,

we review who to tell, what to tell, and how to tell it. We also communicate with the adult in charge about what to look for and how to resolve issues that may arise because of our daughter’s ASD (autism spectrum disorder).

Many times, we struggle with the right time to reveal that Kerrienne has ASD. Mostly, we wait until we are meeting face-to-face with the person in charge of the activity. As a result, the person in charge will associate the new situation as with Kerrienne and not with “some kid with a disability I met once.”

A key factor in our daughter’s success has been teaching her how to grow into her social identity, that is, her race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religious belief. Like any other facet of her social identity, having ASD is something she needs to feel good about. Because we want her to be proud of who she is, we teach her to embrace all of who she is.

We also make sure that our daughter participates in activities with other neuro-atypical children, like those who attend Special Olympics Delaware, the children and youth program at the Mary Campbell Center, and the PEERS program offered at our daughter’s school.

Altogether, our effort has helped our daughter build the confidence and skills she needs to be successful in any setting. Our experience in raising our “different” girl in a typical world has been exciting and beneficial. Yes, more effort and monitoring have been needed to include her in the extracurricular activities, but all of it is worthwhile because our Kerrienne is growing into a life in which she will thrive.

—Tonia Bell-Delgado



**Kerrienne in her Girl Scout uniform**

### **What’s the basic difference between an IEP and a 504 plan?**

**Basically, where an IEP focuses on “a child’s special education experience at school,” a 504 plan lays out “how a child will have access to learning at school”**

**([understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/504-plan/the-difference-between-ieps-and-504-plans](http://understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/504-plan/the-difference-between-ieps-and-504-plans)).**

## **Get your parent packet!**

**For information on the various resources available to Delaware parents with children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), contact Autism Delaware and ask for a parent packet.**

**Inclusion in the classroom**

# Special educator introduces ASD during Autism Awareness Month

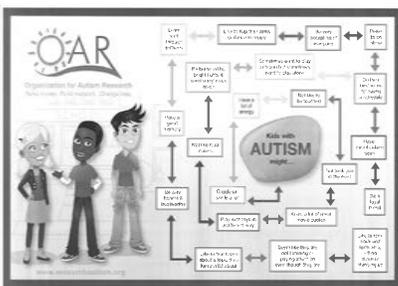
**The mother of two children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), Karen Tuohy volunteers as coordinator of Autism Delaware's weekly bowling program and works as a special educator at Heritage Elementary School.**

When Karen Tuohy's children, Sean and Bridget, were younger, she took them to the public playground—where they usually got strange looks. "The other parents would pull their children away from us," explains Tuohy, "and I'd hear the barely under-the-breath comments. I won't even mention the reactions when one or both of my children would have a meltdown. I'm sure you know what I'm talking about."

As Sean and Bridget began classes under the supervision of staff at the Delaware Autism Program's Brennen School, Tuohy realized her children would not be subjected to these reactions anymore, at least not during school hours. "I felt relief," sighs Tuohy.

A few years ago, the second-grade team at Heritage Elementary approached Tuohy and asked if she would present to their classes a lesson on autism awareness. "As with all schools in the Red Clay Consolidated School District," says Tuohy, "we have students with all types of abilities. Remembering my own children's experience in the park, I agreed to come up with a kid-friendly approach that included acceptance of people who are different as well as awareness of autism and its effect on the family."

Now, every April, which is Autism Awareness Month, Tuohy gives her presentation to Heritage Elementary's second-grade classes. She begins by showing an Organization for Autism Research (OAR) poster called *Kids with autism might...* and reading a few of the noted characteristics, such as "Have a lot of energy," "Have a great memory," and "Giggle or smile a lot."



When I ask the students if they know anyone who has these characteristics," notes Tuohy, "every hand shoots up. So, I discuss a few more. In all the years and in all the classrooms I've given my presentation, the students always come to the same conclusion: Children with autism are not all that different—which means children with autism can succeed just like anyone else."

To reinforce this conclusion, Tuohy shows a CBSNEWS video featuring Jason McElwain who, back in 2006, was a teenager with autism and a member of his high school's basketball team. During a highly competitive game, with only four minutes remaining, McElwain's team was down. The coach put him in. And McElwain proceeded to score 20 points—

including six difficult three-point shots—to win the game. "The students love this video," smiles Tuohy. "They get so excited that they end up jumping up and down and cheering for Jason just like the crowd at the game. They clap and stomp when Jason gets lifted onto his teammates' shoulders. The boys always ask 'Can we watch that again?'"

Tuohy ends the presentation by handing out a coloring page of an autism awareness ribbon. For students who want more information, she also hands out a booklet called *Growing Up Together*. "This booklet is a wonderfully kid-friendly resource," says Tuohy. "I highly recommend it, not only for its simple language but also for the ideas on how to be a friend to someone with ASD. Many children would like to reach out but are not sure how. This booklet could get them started."

For a copy of *Growing Up Together*, visit [bridges4kids.org/pdf/Growing\\_Up\\_Booklet.pdf](http://bridges4kids.org/pdf/Growing_Up_Booklet.pdf). For more on the Organization for Autism Research (OAR), visit [researchautism.org](http://researchautism.org).

## How is inclusion being implemented in Delaware's schools?

With inclusion, the state wants all children to be educated together, in the same environment, using the same curriculum. To see a self-contained or separate setting for children with individualized education programs (IEPs) is now rare.



As a special educator, my role has changed from what it had been. Now, students who need my support are spread throughout the school building. I work with kindergarten, third-, and fifth-grade students, and I may "push into" a classroom to meet a student's specific need or "pull" a small group out of a classroom to address a need that the students have in common.

As case manager, I work with the students' teachers to figure out how best to meet any needs. A "support" can be anything from a scheduling change put in place to ensure a student's success to a student's use of lined paper turned sideways to help line up numbers in a math problem. This means, I work at connecting with 14 teachers weekly—without interrupting instructional time and without a common planning time. It's a matter of scheduling, and it has been challenging. I have become a competent juggler, but I aim to be better!

The implementation of inclusion might look different from school to school, but it means that everybody gets what they need to be successful in the core curriculum.

**—Karen Tuohy**

# INSIDE Autism<sup>™</sup> Delaware

## Advocacy and outreach

“What makes advocacy successful?” begins Autism Delaware policy and community outreach director Alex Eldreth. “Grass roots participation!

“Did you know the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines ‘grass roots’ as ‘the very foundation of advocacy’; and ‘advocacy’ as ‘the act or process of supporting a cause.’ In other words, the foundation of any successful grass roots advocacy effort is the people who support a cause or change in the community. At Autism Delaware, it’s the friends, families, and individuals living with ASD [autism spectrum disorder]. We all need to be heard.”

Consider lending your voice on April 2 for Smart Cookie Day. Autism advocates

can encourage their legislators to support policies that respect the needs of families living with ASD.

“Families can share their personal stories of daily life with loved ones on the autism spectrum,” continues Eldreth, “and to advocate for their needs while presenting baked goodies—hence, ‘smart cookie’—to the Delaware General Assembly in Legislative Hall.” To take part, contact Eldreth at alex.eldreth@delautism.org.

Also planned is a press conference at Leg Hall. The media will be invited as well as all Delaware legislators to hear the most up-to-date information about autism and Autism Delaware’s efforts. The starting time is scheduled for 12:30 PM.



**Successful advocacy efforts help raise autism awareness—and make an impression on our children. Here, after signing SB22 into law, Gov. Jack Markell shakes hands with Dylan Carnright. SB22 is the 2012 legislation requiring insurance coverage for autism treatment.**

## On the autism educational task force

Introduced in 2013, the Delaware strategic plan to improve services and supports for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) came about following an 18-month effort by the University of Delaware’s Center for Disabilities Studies, Autism Delaware, the Department of Education, and many state agencies, parents, and advocates.

Since the blueprint’s final report was published, the Interagency Committee on Autism (ICA) has been meeting regularly to establish what agencies and organizations are doing as well as to try to move the effort forward with limited funding. Working with the ICA and Delaware State Senator Margaret Rose Henry (D-Del 2nd Dist.), Autism Delaware helped craft language to create a legislative task force. Passed as senate concurrent resolution 65 (SCR65) in June 2014, the Delaware General Assembly Autism Educational Task Force was formed and charged with enhancing autism education and resources for Delaware’s public schools. The aim is to support all students with ASD and to determine the structure and funding for a statewide autism resource network that would provide the training and technical assistance as outlined in the previously mentioned blueprint.

As of the printing of this issue of *The Sun*, the task force is considering two main recommendations. (The report will be issued April 1.)

1. Amend Title 14 of the Delaware Code to increase current resources for supporting students with ASD in all Delaware public schools. Enhancements to Title 14 are intended to
  - provide necessary support to the office of the statewide director of the Delaware Autism Program and to increase training and technical assistance for educators in schools

- across the state and
  - extend support for all students with ASD.
2. Introduce new legislation to establish the ICA as a state entity as well as to establish the Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism (the Network). Funding for the Network would come from the state legislature and individual state agencies. Designed to be led by an executive director, the Network would be housed (for administrative purposes) at UD’s Center for Disabilities Studies.

“I think that it is crucial that the [Network] be viewed as closing gaps across systems of care. These gaps are real, are the source of major breakdowns and inefficiencies, and closing them could only be accomplished by a group like [the Network] that coordinates efforts across agencies,” says Peter Doehring, PhD, former statewide director of the Delaware Autism Program and national systems expert.

“The Network would be a true network, leveraging the best assets available throughout Delaware,” adds Autism Delaware executive director Teresa Avery. “It would not provide services but rather training, coaching, and technical assistance for professionals serving those with ASD. Those providing training and technical assistance to the schools would be housed at the Network and managed by the office of the statewide director.”

As part of Autism Delaware’s desire to share information with parent and advocacy groups, this update describes the continuous effort to introduce legislation and request funding to support services for individuals with ASD during the 2015 session of the Delaware General Assembly.

## Free golf lessons

Free to youth with ASD aged 8–21, the Autism Delaware Junior Golf Program for 2015 begins in September. The five-week program offers a choice of lesson days (Monday or Wednesday) and start times.

Golf techniques are taught by professional golfer and coach Butch Holtzclaw at The Rookery South Golf Course in Milton. Personal skills are also encouraged, including sportsmanship and perseverance.

For more information, visit [autismdelaware.org](http://autismdelaware.org).



**Monday**  
(Sept. 14–Oct. 19)

**Wednesday**  
(Sept. 16–Oct. 21)

**4:30 PM or 5:15 PM**



## Day camp at Children’s Beach House

The ever-popular Children’s Beach House in Lewes will again be home to the Autism Delaware Summer Day Camp this year, August 17–20. As many as 30 children with ASD (from those who will be enrolled in the third grade to those who will be 17 in the 2015–16 school year) are invited to sail, kayak, swim, and take part in a low ropes course, sports activities, and arts and crafts. All these activities provide a child with ASD with opportunities for working on communication, self-esteem, and social skills as well as the chance to try something new.

For more information, visit [autismdelaware.org](http://autismdelaware.org).

**The \$250 fee for Autism Delaware’s day camp can be paid with your child’s respite funds.**

**To be eligible for respite funds, you must apply and be accepted by the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services.**

**Apply at [dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/ddds](http://dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/ddds).**

## Swim camp

Designed for youth with ASD who are 4–21 and toilet-trained, the Autism Delaware Swim Camp offers development of water-safety skills, basic swim instruction, and swim stroke development as well as group recreation and a fun time in the water.

This year’s sessions take place again at The Rookery North’s pool in Milford.

Parents remain for each session to observe and learn ways they can support their children’s swim skills outside of the swim camp.

For details, visit [autismdelaware.org](http://autismdelaware.org).



## Peterson honored with PCIT Star

The Delaware Children’s Department’s Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services honored Autism Delaware clinical director Susan Peterson, PhD, BCBA-D, in December with the BEST PCIT Supporting Star Award. Given at the annual conference for Delaware’s providers of parent-child interaction therapy (PCIT), the certificate of appreciation recognizes Peterson’s outstanding commitment to expanding PCIT horizons in 2014.

Extensive training of professionals in PCIT has been provided by a grant initiative called Delaware’s BEST (Bringing an Evidence-based System of Care and Treatment to young children and their families).

“PCIT has a growing body of evidence as an effective intervention for young children with autism,” says Peterson, “and I’ve worked diligently to bring PCIT to Delaware families with one or more children with autism. I am very grateful to Autism Delaware for giving me this opportunity—and for the PCIT Star! I am extremely flattered.”

For more information about PCIT, visit [autismdelaware.org](http://autismdelaware.org). Or call (302) 224-6020, ext. 221.



**Happy graduates of Peterson’s PCIT effort, Sarah and James**

## Programs

### April

- 1**—Parent coffee hour. Hampton Inn. 117 Sandhill Dr. Middletown. 9:30 AM.
- 1, 8, 15, 22, 29**—Bowling night. Bowlerama. 3031 New Castle Av. New Castle. 5:30–7:00 PM. *Register:* Karen Tuohy at (302) 633-3316.
- 2**—Bounce Night. Hopping Good Time. 23 Cochran Dr. Bldg. 6. Camden. 5:30–7:30 PM. *R.S.V.P:* Gail Hecky at (302) 644-3410.
- 7**—Bowling night. Milford Lanes. 809 N. Dupont Blvd. Milford. 6:00–8:00 PM. *Register:* Gail Hecky at (302) 644-3410.
- 10**—Teen/Tween game night. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30–8:30 PM. *Register:* Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.
- 14**—Parent coffee hour. Panera Bread. 3650 Kirkwood Hwy. Wilmington. 7:00 PM.
- 16**—Parent coffee hour. Georgia House Restaurant. 18 South Walnut St. Milford. 9:00 AM.

### May (continued)

- 150 Commerce Dr. Middletown. 10:00 AM.
- 16**—Sensory-friendly roller skating party. Christiana Skating Center. 801 Christiana Rd. Newark. 5:15–7:15 PM.
- 19**—Parent coffee hour. Holiday Inn Express. 1780 N. Dupont Hwy. Dover. 9:00 AM.
- 23**—Sensory-friendly roller skating. Milford Skating Center. One Park Av. Milford. 5:00–7:00 PM. *Register:* Gail Hecky at (302) 644-3410.
- 23**—Sensory-friendly movie: *Tomorrow Land*. Carmike Cinemas in the Dover Mall. 1365 N. DuPont Hwy. Dover. 10:00 AM.
- 29**—Teen/Tween game night. Autism Delaware Lewes office. 6:00–7:45 PM. *Register:* Dafne Carnright at (302) 644-3410.
- 30**—Sensory-friendly movie: *Monster Trucks*. Carmike Cinemas in the Dover Mall. 1365 N. DuPont Hwy. Dover. 10:00 AM.

### Raise awareness and funds

*in support of Autism Delaware programs and services!*

#### Walk for Autism

- **April 18**  
Cape Henlopen State Park, Lewes
- **April 25**  
Fox Point State Park, Wilmington

**Register:**  
[autismdelaware.org](http://autismdelaware.org)

**18**—Sensory-friendly movie: *Monkey Kingdom*. Carmike Cinemas in the Dover Mall. 1365 N. DuPont Hwy. Dover. 10:00 AM.

**18**—Sensory-friendly movie: TBD. Westown Movies. 150 Commerce Dr. Middletown. 10:00 AM.

**24**—Teen/Tween game night. Autism Delaware Lewes office. 6:00–7:45 PM. *Register:* Dafne Carnright at (302) 644-3410.

### May

**6**—Parent coffee hour. Hampton Inn. 117 Sandhill Dr. Middletown. 9:30 AM.

**6, 13, 20, 27**—Bowling night. Bowlerama. 3031 New Castle Av. New Castle. 5:30–7:00 PM. *Register:* Karen Tuohy at (302) 633-3316.

**8**—Teen/Tween game night. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30–8:30 PM. *Register:* Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

**12**—Parent coffee hour. Panera Bread. 3650 Kirkwood Hwy. Wilmington. 9:00 AM.

**16**—Sensory-friendly movie: TBD. Westown Movies.

### June

**1**—Parent coffee hour. Surf Bagel. 17382 Coastal Hwy. Lewes. 9:00 AM.

**3**—Parent coffee hour. Hampton Inn. 117 Sandhill Dr. Middletown. 9:30 AM.

**3, 10, 17, 24**—Bowling night. Bowlerama. 3031 New Castle Av. New Castle. 5:30–7:00 PM. *Register:* Karen Tuohy at (302) 633-3316.

**5**—Teen/Tween game night. Autism Delaware Lewes office. 6:00–7:45 PM. *Register:* Dafne Carnright at (302) 644-3410.

**9**—Parent coffee hour. Panera Bread. 3650 Kirkwood Hwy. Wilmington. 7:00 PM.

**10**—Family swim. Siegel Jewish Community Center. 101 Garden of Eden Rd. Wilmington. 12:30–2:30 PM. *Register:* Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

**12**—Teen/Tween game night. Autism Delaware Newark office. 6:30–8:30 PM. *Register:* Heidi Mizell at (302) 224-6020.

**20**—Sensory friendly movie: TBD. Westown Movies. 150 Commerce Dr. Middletown. 10:00 AM.

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## Inclusion in recreation

# Project UNIFY®

How do you create a society of acceptance and inclusion? Bring all the young people together—both those with intellectual disabilities (IDs) and those without—and let them play sports. This is the idea behind Special Olympics Project UNIFY®. Through sports, young people can gain the knowledge, attitude, and skills needed to promote acceptance, respect, and human dignity for all children. In turn, these young people will take their knowledge, attitude, and skills to school where they'll create and sustain an inclusive community.

"Special Olympics aims to build a society of acceptance and inclusion for people with IDs and, by extension, for everyone," explains Special Olympics Delaware director of youth and school initiatives Kylie Melvin. "We know that sports training and competition can help achieve this goal. And we know that students—with their energy, idealism, intelligence, and creativity—not only can be participants in our mission but also leaders.

"To ignite young people's passion for our cause," adds Melvin, "we have to reach them where they most often are, and that's school. At all grade levels, students' lives revolve around their schools and school activities. That is why we conceived Project UNIFY as a school-based initiative—to create opportunities for authentic social inclusion."

The project's three main components provide opportunities for all students through various programs:

- **inclusive sports and fitness**—Unified Sports®, Unified Sports Recreation, Young Athletes™, summer camp, games and tournaments, and coaching and volunteering
- **youth leadership and advocacy**—youth activation committees, youth leadership conferences, and inclusive leadership programs
- **school-wide engagement**—Get Into It™ resources and activities, Spread the Word to End the R-Word™, Fans in the Stands, youth rallies, and Cool Schools at the Polar Plunge

"The combination of these unique components," continues Melvin, "provides the most opportunity for creating positive school climates and to ensuring that all students, particularly those with IDs, become part of the social fabric of the school."

According to Project UNIFY statistics, 74 percent of participating students said Project UNIFY was a positive turning point in their lives, that they became more patient, and that they learned to compromise. Two-thirds said they learned they have things in common with their peers with IDs. And 66 percent of teacher liaisons saw a raising of awareness for students both with and without IDs as well as increased opportunities to work together.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Special Olympics Project UNIFY is a national effort. The goal is to activate young people into becoming agents of change while promoting inclusive school communities. To become a Project UNIFY school, send an email to [kymel@udel.edu](mailto:kymel@udel.edu). Or call (302) 831-8582.

## Meeting the needs Continued from page 3

intervention, teaching social skills, and IEP development. Veenema helps school teams develop IEPs that not only focus on a child's behavior and social skills but also make the IEP more measurable and data-driven.

"Students with autism have varying needs," says Veenema, who worked at the Brennen School and AdvoServ as a special-education teacher with a certification in autism prior to joining the DE-PBS Project. "Some may have communication needs and may not be able to share their needs and wants expressively or receptively. We can make those connections that help students in all areas, including social, behavioral, and academic."

A focus of Veenema's effort involves support for educators in implementing the PEERS Program. Developed at the University of California, Los Angeles, this 16-week, social skills curriculum is for adolescents and is being implemented in Delaware pilot schools through a selection process. PEERS' premise, as a social skills program, is to teach adolescents how to make and keep friends.

"My role," continues Veenema, "is to support the teacher in any area of need throughout the curriculum, from scheduling logistics to curriculum questions. Teachers have already seen a positive difference in their students' social skills since the implementation of the PEERS curriculum."

## More resources

**A book about social skills—*The Science of Making Friends*, by Elizabeth A. Laugeson, PsyD, ©2013 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.**

**Information on the 2016 Inclusion Conference in Delaware can be found online at [deinclusionconference.org](http://deinclusionconference.org).**

**For online info on how your child can be included in the general-education curriculum, visit these websites:**

- [deaccessproject.org](http://deaccessproject.org)
- [kidstogether.org/inclusion.htm](http://kidstogether.org/inclusion.htm)

**To learn more online about inclusion in recreation, visit these websites:**

- [FamilySHADE.org](http://FamilySHADE.org)
- [nchpad.org/59/435/Providing~Inclusive~Recreation~Opportunities~~The~Cincinnati~Model](http://nchpad.org/59/435/Providing~Inclusive~Recreation~Opportunities~~The~Cincinnati~Model)

**The founder of the Talk About Curing Autism (TACA) Now website posts a blog about inclusion at [tacanow.org/family-resources/inclusion-a-journey-so-far-lessons-learned](http://tacanow.org/family-resources/inclusion-a-journey-so-far-lessons-learned).**

**Inclusion in the classroom**

**Introducing a child with ASD**

**When Casey Gilden was enrolled in a public school first-grade class in September 2014, his mother, Sun contributor Cory Gilden, began preparing for her annual trek to Casey's new classroom to introduce her son—and autism spectrum disorder (ASD)—to his teachers and classmates.**

About one week before Casey joined the inclusive classroom, Cory Gilden came in as a guest speaker. Based on suggestions made by other parents of children with ASD, Gilden crafted a presentation that included reading *Since We're Friends: An Autism Picture Book*, by Celeste Shally. "It was a little lesson plan," explains Gilden, "so I discussed it with both the regular-education and special-ed teachers in advance. They were both very receptive."

To Gilden, no other children in the first-grade classroom at the time had obvious disabilities,

and none had heard the word "autistic" before. (In fact, some thought she was saying "artistic.") So, Gilden began by introducing the concept of autism: "I come from the point of view that 'Obviously, our kids with autism are different.' I just had to explain to the neuro-typical children how to be friends with a child with autism. I said 'This kid is just like you and me. We all have our strengths and weaknesses. Kids with autism have brains that work differently; this is how you can help. Let's help each other out.'"

Then, Gilden read the book and fielded comments. "The kids were able to relate to it," notes Gilden. "One said 'Oh, my cousin is like that!'"

Gilden recommends that a parent take the initiative in introducing a child at the beginning of a new school year: "I took it on because I wanted other children in Casey's social life. Plus, he should be able to turn to a classmate and ask for clarification when he needs it. And the classmate should feel free to approach Casey when the classmate needs help, too.

"Anyone can do it," assures Gilden. "Just pause and think of your child in the classroom and how classmates can help fos-

ter interactions. Tell the classmates how to respond to your child with autism. Often, kids don't know what to do and need to be told how to handle a situation.

"I'm proud that I introduced neuro-typical first-graders to the concept of autism. The earlier you get to these children, the sooner they'll learn not to be afraid.

"The situation can sometimes be tricky," adds Gilden, "because every parent, child, para, and regular-ed teacher comes from a different background. The school may not make introductions a priority, and not all teachers will introduce a child with a disability into the classroom. The para is not trained for it and may have no idea how to handle the situation.

"My approach is good for the regular-ed teacher as well as the children because I describe Casey and explain his strengths and weaknesses. Now, everyone in the classroom knows what to say when they see one of Casey's actions."

Today, Casey attends special education and therapy about 1 1/2 to 2 hours a day and is in the inclusive classroom about 4 to 4 1/2 hours a day. "This works well for Casey right now because he is at an appropriate academic level with his peers," explains Gilden, "and the kids in the regular-ed classroom give him an example of how to behave. But he still gets one-on-one practice on his IEP goals, separately with therapists and with the special-ed teacher. I think Casey also enjoys the ordered environment and routine of the regular-ed classroom. It allows him to participate in things like field trips and singing concerts that the DAP classroom doesn't take part in. But he also appreciates going to his DAP classroom to get a sensory break and to earn rewards.

"The regular-ed kids have really taken to Casey," adds Gilden, "and make a special point of saying hi to him when he comes in. Casey loves the attention! Young children have the natural inclination to help when they can. And when they help Casey, they feel grownup. And Casey feels cared about—so it's a win-win!"



**Casey Gilden**

**On being a peer partner**

In the autism community, a peer partner is usually a neuro-typical young person who partners with another young person who not only belongs to the same age or social group but who has autism spectrum disorder (ASD). For local Delaware teens Missy Mizell and Frankie Nardo, becoming peer partners was an obvious step in their growing-up process. Mizell's mother is long-time parent mentor and Autism Delaware resource coordinator Heidi Mizell, and Nardo's mother is Autism Delaware volunteer and newsletter committee member Jen Nardo.

"I had volunteer hours to do for school, but I don't remember ever not knowing about peer partners," begins Nardo, a high school senior who wants to study marketing or psychology in college.

"I was 15 or 16 when I heard about TOPSoccer [a youth program that helps children with disabilities to learn and play soccer]," adds Nardo. "And I'm happy I did it. It brightened my day just as it seemed to do for the kids."

**Continued at the bottom of page 11**

## Inclusion in the adult community

Designed to help adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) statewide to be successful in their employment and volunteer and wellness activities, the Autism Delaware program known as Productive Opportunities for Work and Recreation (or POW&R, for short) has a mission: to create the networks that connect individuals with ASD to resources in their communities as well as to support their choices for how they live, work, and spend their leisure time.

As of January 2015, 84 POW&R participants enjoyed life as adults in Delaware—with good reason. “Community inclusion is always at the heart of POW&R’s person-centered community-based programming,” says POW&R director Katina Demetriou. “At POW&R, we believe that individuals with autism can be the most successful when they have the strong support of our community.”

Two of POW&R’s many successful stories of inclusion in the Delaware community are Omar Brown and Madison “Madie” Nicoletti.



**Omar Brown at work**

Omar sells hot nuts at Cabela’s (the Christiana Mall’s new sports outfitter) five days a week, including busy Saturdays. He is responsible for roasting pecans, almonds, and cashews and filling compartment containers and paper cones with customers’ orders. Throughout the store, Omar can be heard calling “Hot nuts! Come get your hot nuts!” In addition to being quite the

salesman, Omar assists with customer service and directs inquiring customers to the nearby restroom.

When not at work, Omar enjoys a variety of community activities. Joining POW&R participants and staff at Special Olympics, he relies on his athletic skills as a member of the volleyball, basketball, swimming, and golf teams. Omar also enjoys volunteer activities with other POW&R participants and staff, including working in a community garden maintained by POW&R, collecting food donations and portioning do-

ated items for distribution to needy families at Cedars Church of Christ, and sorting food items at the Food Bank of Delaware.

Madie works as a laundry assistant at Bad Hair Day in Rehoboth Beach. Three days a week, she washes towels, pillow cases, and other linens needed daily at the salon and day spa. Then, she folds, rolls, and delivers the linens to each of the salon’s stations. Madie has also assisted in the stamping of tip envelopes and sorting of perm rods. And in the summer months, Madie maintains the salon’s flower boxes and planters.

When not at work, Madie lunches with friends, swims at the Boys & Girls Club of Delaware, tends the flower garden outside Autism Delaware’s Lewes office, and gets her nails manicured with all the colors of the rainbow.

For more information about POW&R, visit [autismdelaware.org/AdultServices](http://autismdelaware.org/AdultServices).



**Madie Nicoletti watering the Lewes office garden**

### On being a peer partner Continued from page 10

“I have been heavily influenced by my mom,” says Mizell, a college freshman at New York University. Mizell majors in communicative sciences and disorders and wants to go into research or therapy specifically concerning ASD.

“Mom would never consider anything other than helping. Being a peer partner is not really an option—just a way of life because of my upbringing.

“When I was 7 or 8,” adds Mizell, “I understood I was a unified partner with Special Olympics through the Mary Campbell Center. To me, there’s no difference between being a unified partner and being a peer partner.

“When [my older brother] Shane aged out of Mary Campbell,” continues Mizell, “I was 15 and had been in the program since I was 3. All the children in the group, I considered my friends; you didn’t think about the disability. I didn’t think I would like staying in the program for siblings and friends

after Shane aged out, so I just volunteered.”

“I was worried,” says Nardo of his initial concerns about peer partnering, “about doing something wrong and not being engaged enough or in control of the play while still having fun. What surprised me was how happy the kids were that I was just there, no matter what we were doing.

“Inclusion to me,” defines Nardo, “is giving those living with disabilities the opportunity to experience something new and make a friend.”

“At the Mary Campbell Center,” adds Mizell, “we make sure that, if an affected kid brings a friend or relative, [that friend or relative] knows how to get along. We say ‘The kids with disabilities are different, but do not treat them differently.’

“To me, inclusion is being friends first. Affected kids are your actual peers. That word is literal.”

**To me, inclusion is being friends first. Affected kids are your actual peers. That word is literal.**



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Helping People and Families Affected by Autism

Photo by Carol Manion



2015 Walk for Autism

# Show your love and support!

Your participation on walk day is one way to show love and support for your loved one with autism. And your fundraising effort is what fuels Autism Delaware's goal—to support your loved one and so many others with autism throughout their lifetimes.

Register to walk today. And don't forget to set up your fundraising page, too, at [autismdelaware.org](http://autismdelaware.org).

**Two dates to walk!**

**Saturday, April 18**  
Cape Henlopen State Park, Lewes

**Saturday, April 25**  
Fox Point State Park, Wilmington

# autismdelaware.org