

The Sun

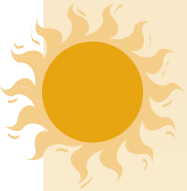
Newsletter

Summer 2019

What would you do if your son didn't want you at his school?

Read about one mother's solution on the Autism Delaware blog page: [Autism Delaware.org/Stay Connected/Blog](http://AutismDelaware.org/StayConnected/Blog).

Choose the article *When your child does not want you at school*, by Jen Nardo.



Our mission

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

The back-to-school issue

The social side of transition

This back-to-school issue takes an overview of the social side of transition. Beginning with the transition into kindergarten and moving through to the first day of college, all students require an age-appropriate level of social skill that, if absent, may promote exclusion.

For a neurotypical student, these transitions are difficult enough. For a student with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the ability to interact and communicate socially is hampered further by his or her autism; it's safe to say that the student on the spectrum is in need of some kind of support.

Starting here and in the following pages, we offer an explanation of some transition issues and a few tips for helping a child with ASD to become more social as he or she takes part in an educational program.

A key to success

// Strong social skills are as key to school success as academic ones. In fact, sometimes they're even more important..." quotes child development expert Michele Borba, EdD, in Shaun Dreisbach's online article entitled *Social Skills Grade by Grade*. "Research shows that kindergartners who can wait will do better in school

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You are not alone in your effort to address your child's social interaction and social communication skills. Your child's individualized education plan (or IEP, for short) is the appropriate vehicle for addressing his or her needs as a student in the public school system.

Autism Delaware's family support program can help you through the system in a number of ways, from one-on-one navigation to individualized help at an IEP meeting.

To start the process, call Autism Delaware intake coordinator Melanie Matusheski at (302) 224-6020, ext. 219.

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The Sun

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Taking the opportunity

As the new president of the Autism Delaware Board of Directors, I am grateful for the opportunity to serve such a fine organization. The board and I are privileged to work for this organization. Together with Autism Delaware's staff, we strive to help people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder.

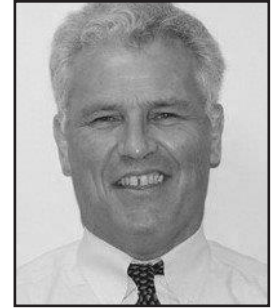
My wife Liz and I have a long-standing connection to Autism Delaware. Our daughter Lorraine is on the autism spectrum and has been well served by Autism Delaware since the nonprofit was formed 20 years ago. Currently, Lorraine is a participant in Autism Delaware's adult employment program, Productive Opportunities for Work & Recreation (or POW&R, for short), and in Autism Delaware's individualized residential supports services. My wife and I would be lost without Autism Delaware's help.

Since coming on board in January, I've been taking a cram course in the details involved in an organization with 109 employees who serve 1,190 families. Learning the scope and reach of Autism Delaware's services and the complexities of running a successful nonprofit has been a challenge, and I'm still on a learning curve.

On the other hand, a couple of opportunities have made my transition go smoothly. One is the guidance offered by Autism Delaware executive director Brian Hall. He has taken the time to help me learn the ropes while keeping the organization on track and moving forward. I am thankful for Brian's help and will continue to work closely with him.

The second opportunity is witnessing firsthand and up close the passion and commitment of Autism Delaware's staff. Simply put, the staff members are amazing. Their dedication to helping others is heartwarming and inspiring, and their work enables individuals with autism and their families to have the opportunity to learn, grow, and live full lives as included and valued members of their communities. Our staff members deserve our admiration and our gratitude.

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A service of Autism Delaware



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three years later than those who came in knowing their letters” (<https://www.scholastic.com/parents/family-life/parent-child/social-skills-grade-grade.html>).

As a parenting and children’s health author, Dreisbach then lists social skills that teachers look for in their neurotypical pre-K to fifth-grade students and how to teach them. For the complete article, visit <https://www.scholastic.com/parents/family-life/parent-child/social-skills-grade-grade.html>.

These skills are not as easily assimilated by students on the autism spectrum and require more support. According to autism author Lisa Jo Rudy, who is also the mother of a young adult on the spectrum, “Most children with autism have a tough time fitting in with their peers... [T]here are some concrete steps you can take as a parent to help your child make sense of the expectations of people around them” (<https://www.verywellhealth.com/autistic-child-social-tips-260371>).

At the top of Rudy’s list of five recommendations is “Teach your child to speak like a child.” For example, a parent may think it’s a good idea to teach a child to say “Thank you for the lovely gift,” but this reply is something an older person would say and will result in ribbing by the child’s fellow students. Rudy’s advice to parents: “[L]isten in to [sic] therapy sessions, make suggestions, and whenever possible, help your child out by teaching him (or, ideally, having other children teach him) kid-speak” (<https://www.verywellhealth.com/autistic-child-social-tips-260371>).



- Rudy’s other four recommendations are
- teach your child to play,
 - teach your child basic sports skills and terms,
 - teach your child to navigate a playground, and
 - watch age-appropriate TV and movies with your child.

To read Rudy’s complete article, visit <https://www.verywellhealth.com/autistic-child-social-tips-260371>.

These books may help

Behaviors that hurt! is a 10-page social story with picture icons aimed at pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, and first-grade students. Each page targets a different behavior. Find this resource and others at teacherspayteachers.com. Choose the Product menu and then Social Story.

Our brains are like computers! helps children on the autism spectrum to understand how their words and actions can affect other people and offers guidance on appropriate social behavior. This book is available at <http://autismteachingstrategies.com/social-cause-effect-book>.

When do you jump in to help?

“If there’s an academic problem at school,” writes former classroom teacher and early intervention specialist Amanda Morin, “you may feel confident about when to jump in. But what if your child is having a social problem?” (<https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/child-social-situations/social-problems-at-school-how-and-when-to-jump-in>).

In her online article for **Understood.org** entitled *Social Problems at School: How and When to Jump In*, Morin lists four questions a parent can consider before automatically jumping in:

- How old is your child?
- Is your child in danger?
- Does your child understand the situation?
- Have you taught your child the skills to handle this?

“It’s important for your child to learn problem-solving and coping skills,” notes Morin. “The more you jump in, the less opportunity he has” (<https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/child-social-situations/social-problems-at-school-how-and-when-to-jump-in>).

For this article and more, visit **Understood.org**, and choose the Friends & Feelings menu.

Family services

Autism Delaware™ offers

- one-on-one family navigation,
- support groups,
- respite opportunities, and
- social recreation.

For more information, call the Newark office at (302) 224-6020.

Creating a well-crafted plan

“Well over 8 million students annually receive special education services, but as these individuals reach the ages of 18–21, there is not usually a well-crafted plan in place to gain access to the community, independent living, a real job, and other aspects of entering adulthood such as financial literacy, travel, and social relationships” (Wehman, Paul, PhD, Editor. *Essentials of Transition Planning*. Baltimore, Md.: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., 2011).

Each child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) needs a well-crafted plan, notes Autism Delaware™ resource coordinator Heidi Mizell. Her recommendation: As soon as possible, begin or enhance a student’s plan by adding these three tasks:

Learn to ask for help.

Every time a child asks

a teacher for clarification about an assignment or talks to a fellow student about an extracurricular activity, this exercise helps build social skills as well as educational and self-advocacy skills.

“When people with autism are out in the community,” notes the Autism Speaks website, “it is critical that they know what to do in certain situations that may arise. This may often require asking for help. Knowing how to ask for help safely and in a timely manner will help ensure the safety of your loved one” (<https://www.autismspeaks.org/asking-help>).

For advice an individual with ASD can use on what to do if you get lost, who to ask for help during an emergency, and talking to strangers, visit AutismSpeaks.org.

Use the same language to enhance understanding in school.

Speaking the same lingo as the professionals you’re

talking to is an essential piece of good communication. The current worldwide learning management system (LMS) is known as schoology. Addressing kindergartners through high school seniors, schoology includes assessment management to improve student performance, foster collaboration, and personalize learning (<https://www.schoology.com>). An array of resources is available at <https://www.schoology.com> under Resources.

Develop organizational skills to help manage classroom assignments.

This task promotes the ability to self-manage and will come in handy across the individual’s lifespan. Being able to manage one’s life is key to becoming as independent as possible.

The GradePower Learning website offers ten tips for improving a student’s ability to manage his or her time. The list includes tips to “create a master schedule, use an agenda, eliminate distractions, set goals for each study session, start working on assignments early, make a project plan, work on one thing at a time, study in shorter bursts, start early in the day,” and “get 8–10 hours of sleep” (<https://gradepowerlearning.com/10-time-management-tips-students>).

For the details, visit <https://gradepowerlearning.com/10-time-management-tips-students>.

Try new things with a peer buddy

How can you help your child step out of his or her comfort zone and try new things? By pairing your child with a peer buddy.

Tell your child’s school team that your child needs to be paired with a fellow student who’s interested in extracurricular activities and able and willing to ask your child to participate. With a peer buddy, your child will have an in with the group and gain some confidence about socializing with fellow students.

For a college-level program and career transition

Vincent J. Varrassi, MA, LDT-C, offers a guide on effective transitional planning. In addition to the necessary skills for success, Varrassi includes real-life students’ stories, sample transition goals, and examples of what’s needed to navigate the college terrain.

For details, read Varrassi’s book entitled *Transition to College and Career: Experienced-based Strategies to Improve Readiness of Students with Disabilities*. The paperback is available at Amazon.com.

For more information, visit https://www.vincentvarrassi.com/About_Vincent_Varrassi.html.

The challenges and opportunities of middle school

Middle school can be a huge transition for both students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their parents because it brings new challenges and opportunities. After years of elementary school routines, families now need to readjust to a new environment, social dynamics, and the special-education team as well as their children’s evolving educational needs and goals.

The challenges

The many new challenges that a new middle school student may face include a larger school, more students, independent transitions between classes, multiple teachers, more independence, more need for organizational skills, and more complex social situations. These challenges have the ability to set a child back socially as well as academically.

To be successful, a student with ASD needs to be familiar with the new environment, teachers, and schedule—**before the first day of school**. To this end, the student could tour the school in advance, meet informally with staff, or shadow a current student (practice a day-in-the-life experience). Textbooks, schedules, and maps could be obtained ahead of time, and social stories could be used to show the student what to expect and how to get away from the chaos and crowds of school. Even a task as seemingly simple as opening a locker can be an intimidating situation for a new student with ASD, especially with hundreds of noisy students in the hallway.

To prepare for these types of challenging situations, parents can meet with staff before the transition to explain their child’s needs and arrange the appropriate accommodations and modifications. If the child is learning self-advocacy, he or she could attend the meeting as well.

Parents should do all they can to make sure that the school staff is familiar with their child’s likes, dislikes, motivators, skills, and needs. Parents and staff can work together to develop a list of important skills that the child needs to navigate

the new environment and the so-called hidden curriculum (the unwritten rules and procedures) as well as a plan to work on these skills in the months before the child starts middle school.

With a different teacher for every subject, the school team is bigger, so the level and importance of the home-school communication is more complex. This communication

network needs to be set up before classes begin, a point person needs to be assigned, and the form of communication needs to be established (through your personal email, for example, or your child’s class notebook).

The opportunities

In addition to the challenges that middle school brings,

new opportunities arise for development and independence. Middle school introduces the opportunity for students to foster self-advocacy by speaking up for what they need or want. Middle school also opens up a student’s potential social network and can build confidence through the new skills developed by taking part in school-sponsored clubs, sports, and enrichment activities.

To take advantage of this opportunity, the child’s potential triggers need to be identified as soon

Sun contributor Cory Gilden is a doctoral student and research assistant at the University of Delaware’s National Leadership Consortium on Developmental Disabilities as well as a parent and long-time autism advocate.



“A key indicator of a successful middle school experience is a positive transition from elementary school. Unfortunately, positive anything is difficult for soon-to-be middle school students, if all they can think about is:

“Will there really be that much more homework?”

“What if I can’t find the bathroom in that big school?”

“Will I be able to open my locker?”

“Do the big kids beat you up?”

“Do they really give swirlies?”

(<http://www.nea.org/tools/16657.htm>).

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The challenges and opportunities of middle school Continued from p. 5

as possible. Examples include sensory stimulation, bullying, and unstructured time (such as the lunch break).

Challenges to your child's ability to be organized also need to be identified as well as the potential organizational supports, such as friendships, coping skills, and sensory sanctuaries.

There should be as few surprises as possible by the time the new school year begins so the student can walk confidently into school and parents can feel assured that their child is having an amazing new experience. Middle school can be a time of tremendous growth for children who are set up to be successful.

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The neurotypical students your child is transitioning with

The social milestones of middle school are tricky for every student because each child matures at his or her own rate. Many neurotypical students struggle with the transition into middle school and throughout their time in this ever-evolving environment.



For a child on the autism spectrum, his or her best effort may not keep pace and highlight the difference in development.

"[T]here are certain cognitive and social skills [that neurotypical] middle schoolers are working on developing by the time high school rolls around," writes teacher and early intervention specialist Amanda Morin in her online article entitled *Developmental Milestones for Typical Middle-Schoolers*. "It's not uncommon for [neurotypical] middle-schoolers to do these things:

- "Bow to peer pressure to be like others; have experiences with bullying
- "Be sensitive to other people's opinions and reactions; think the whole world is watching
- "Develop a sense of pride in accomplishments and an awareness of challenges
- "Keep secrets (Often being able to have secrets is more important than the secret they're keeping.)
- "Have a better awareness of what's appropriate to say in different situations"

There are also physical milestones that come with reaching puberty, notes Morin, cognitive milestones that "develop a lot at this age," and language milestones that "typically develop quickly" (<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/signs-symptoms/developmental-milestones/developmental-milestones-for-typical-middle-schoolers>).

An educational diagnostician's take on tween-teen social skills

Adolescence is a time for increased peer interactions, and students need a variety of social skills to navigate middle school. Tweens and teens need to be able to

- start and maintain a conversation,
- form friendships by demonstrating an interest in a peer's thoughts and feelings,
- accept another's perspective,
- problem solve to compromise with peers, and
- connect socially with others using gestures, facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice.



Because many adolescents with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) lack these social skills, peers may perceive them as different and exclude them.

Social skills may have to be taught explicitly to students with ASD, because they

may not pick up on subtle social cues or have an internal know-how to navigate social situations. Students with ASD who haven't yet mastered social skills can use social stories or social modeling (a form of role-playing) not only to see examples of appropriate behaviors but also to rehearse needed skills. School professionals can help promote independent use of social skills through prompting and scaffolding (an instructional technique with consecutive levels of temporary support).

Goals could be added to the student's individualized education program (IEP), and everyone working with the tween-teen (such as the speech therapist, psychologist, and special-education teacher) can then work on social skills. Working collaboratively is key so that every person working with the student knows how to help him or her socially.

Outside of school, social skills can be nurtured with family support. To learn how to reinforce skills at home, parents could observe their child's therapy sessions in school. Also, the Everyday Speech website provides video lessons on social skills. For more, visit <https://everydayspeech.com/social-skills-videos>.

A family can encourage the child with ASD to take part in extracurricular activities and set up time to socialize with peers outside of school. Participation in such activities could also contribute to an understanding and acceptance of autism and help forge friendships.

Outside of school and home, parents can track legislation that helps families affected by ASD and do what they can to teach their tween-teen how to advocate for him- or herself. By getting involved in the autism community and taking advantage of resources and organizations, such as Autism Delaware, the family can keep its information up to date and relevant as the tween-teen moves through the school system. Did you know, for example, that parents need to look into high school services for 18–21 year olds when their children are still in middle school?

As schools become more inclusive for students with disabilities, an increased effort is being made to create a more welcoming environment for students who are developing their social skills. Bullying becomes less likely with adult support plus lessons on ASD that promote social acceptance and schoolwide awareness events. In fact, as autism awareness spreads, many neurotypical students become more protective of their peers with ASD.

At Skyline Middle School, every staff member has a copy of each student's IEP. Because we are part of an inclusive school district, the Skyline staff constantly supports each student throughout the day, including acting quickly if a student is being bullied. This effort helps create an easier transition for most students.

Sun contributor Kimberly Snyder is an educational diagnostician for the Skyline Middle School in Wilmington.

What is an educational diagnostician?

According to the *Masters in Special Education Program Guide*, an educational diagnostician is "a type of special education teacher who assesses, diagnoses and work with children with learning problems. These professionals operate under a number of titles. They may be called a learning consultant or learning disabilities teacher, but their duties are the same. They work as part of a team of administrators to advise and determine appropriate learning strategies for struggling learners" (<https://www.masters-in-special-education.com/job-profile/educational-diagnostician>).

Socializing past high school

Sun contributor Heidi Mizell is the family resource coordinator for Autism Delaware™ as well as the parent of an adult on the autism spectrum.

A most challenging time for many students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is the transition out of high school. All previous transitions—from kindergarten to elementary school and then to middle and high school—promise an opportunity to get reacquainted with old friends. But once they have graduated from high school, the grad with

ASD tends to lose these social contacts.

What we need to remember is that our children with ASD will be adults a lot longer than they are students. And without social skills, life beyond high school can be a lonely one.

The process for teaching social skills to children with ASD needs to begin at an early age. If we let them be alone as children, very little will motivate them as young adults. And because our kids often struggle with anxiety, the effort will be scary and too overwhelming to enjoy. (For information on how to help your child learn socialization skills, see the previous pages in this issue.)

If your child is now a young adult, he or she may be spending a lot of time on the computer. If your kid is like the many Americans telling themselves that they do their socializing online, it's time for a wake-up call. I don't care how many "friends" you have on Facebook; this process is actually isolating. According to a 2018 research article published on hindawi.com—a global academic community that

promotes open scholarly research to the world and is passionate about open access publishing—online communication "increases chances that individuals... become culturally isolated from their network contacts" (Keijzer, MA, M Mäs, and A Flache. *Communication in Online Social Networks Fosters Cultural Isolation*. Retrieved May 31, 2019, from <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/complexity/2018/9502872>).

Furthermore, making friends online is easier than being face-to-face, because you don't need good social skills and there is no accountability. If someone annoys you, you can find someone else online!

As high school graduates, our young adults with ASD are no longer guided by the accountability and structure of high school. Many caregivers tell me that their loved one stays up all night on the computer or game console and sleeps most of the day. Not only is this schedule difficult to break, but if you are not awake and available during the workday, you can't be your best to find or work a new job.

In addition to the lack of accountability and structure that came with high school, a young adult with ASD is no longer provided the social opportunities that come with an educational program. Your loved one may have experienced school programs that taught social convention, but the process of putting a social skill to good use can be difficult and requires practice. Like any skill, social skills come naturally to some people but not to others.

Helping our adult children to socialize past high school is crucial. The only way they'll socialize is if they enjoy it, and the only way they'll enjoy it is if they learn how to be social.

PEERS® at Autism Delaware

Autism Delaware offers PEERS for adolescents and young adults. The step-by-step curriculum is a 14-week program that builds social skills ranging from how to find someone who could become a friend to what to do if you are being bullied.

Who is the most successful? The adolescents and young adults who not only want to learn the skills but also have parents able to participate in the process, including doing homework, which often entails practicing new skills with the other PEERS participants.

For details, call Autism Delaware intake coordinator Melanie Matusheski to make an appointment: (302) 224-6020, ext. 219.

Learning how to be social

The program for the education and enrichment of relational skills is a clinical intervention for individuals with social challenges. Known as PEERS®, for short, this evidence-based program is available through the University of California, Los Angeles, and offers specifically designed formats for preschoolers, adolescents, and young adults.

For more information, visit <https://www.semel.ucla.edu/peers>.

Support for a smooth college transition



New college students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often struggle with the social demands of college life. And research indicates that

better outcomes result from strong support both before and during the college transition. Unfortunately, the support a student received through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ended when he or she graduated from high school or turned 21. So a student with ASD must rely on parental and caregiver support and learn to self-advocate.

Even if a student sees mom and dad's support as intrusive, the college may see their initial support as key to a smooth transition. "Contrary to what many students think," notes Heather Statler, MA, EdD, academic counselor at Delaware Technical and Community College, "parent input at the beginning of the college experience is welcomed. It is a good idea to have any family members who are familiar with the student's educational journey to be a part of the conversations. Yes, the goal is for the student to become more independent, but the insight families have is very much appreciated."

To promote a successful college experience, several strategies are suggested by the Child Mind Institute®, a nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of children struggling with mental health and learning disorders. All these strategies will strengthen the new college student's social skills and ability to self-advocate.

- **Provide opportunities to practice social skills.** To prepare for the social rigors of college life, a new student on the spectrum needs the opportunity to engage with other students. To help, many colleges offer spe-

cialized summer programs or guidance. High school guidance counselors or college advisors can help identify these programs.

- **Provide opportunities to practice self-advocacy skills as early as possible.** While still in high school, a student can attend his or her individualized education program (IEP) meetings and learn to negotiate on his or her own behalf. In the process, the student will hone the self-advocacy skills that are essential for success at college.

- **Create structure and organizational skills.** A student on the spectrum may be overwhelmed by the lack of structure at college; it's not like high school. Work with the student to set up calendars, weekly schedules, timers, and so on. If necessary, use visuals to help with the planning—and keep it all simple.

- **Begin transition-planning early.** Create a team to help identify the student's strengths and growth areas as well as the specific supports that he or she will be needing.

All students benefit from the chance to acclimate to their new surroundings. And students with ASD especially need a kind and supportive environment. Academic counselor Statler advises her students on the spectrum, "Transitioning means you have to be patient with yourself. Give yourself time to understand the nuances of how college courses work and familiarize yourself with spaces and areas on campus that make you feel most comfortable."

For more information, check out the following organizations dedicated to supporting college students on the spectrum: College Autism Network, CollegeXpress, and the College Autism Spectrum.

Sun contributor Virginia Sticinski is the parent of a young adult on the autism spectrum and member of Autism Delaware's newsletter committee.

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INSIDE Autism™ Delaware

Reserved hours for Glasgow's H!gh 5 Park

As of April 2019, the play area within Glasgow Park, located outside Newark, has reserved hours for individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and their families.



To reserve this scheduled time, Autism Delaware worked with New Castle County Public Works, New Castle County Park Management, Unique Images, and County Councilperson David L. Tackett.

A sign has been posted with the reserved hours every week:

- Wednesday 4:00–6:00 PM
- Saturday 9:00–11:00 AM

“We hope these hours can accommodate your family,” notes Autism Delaware policy and program coordinator Sarah Young, ms. “We will have volunteers onsite to provide resources and information about autism and available services and supports and will continue to be onsite occasionally throughout the season as we are available.”



Thank you, Newark Natural Foods—and all who took part in the register round-up!

In May, Newark Natural Foods promotional director and co-op farmers market manager Patrick L. Galloway (pictured at right) presented a check for \$1,607.66 to Autism Delaware. The donation is the amount collected through the co-op’s register round-up program during National Autism Awareness Month. Accepting the check is Autism Delaware communications coordinator Carla Koss.

If you shopped at the co-op in April and rounded up your bill to the nearest dollar, you helped amass this much-appreciated donation. These funds will support the programs and services needed by people affected by autism spectrum disorder and their families across the state.



2019 Walk attendance record broken!

About 4,000 people took part in both legs of this year’s Walk for Autism. About 800 people walked the Lewes leg in Cape Henlopen State Park in Lewes on April 6, and on April 13 at Fox Point State Park in Wilmington, more than 3,000 walked the route. The purpose of the annual event is to create community while raising funds to support Autism Delaware’s much-needed programs and services. This year’s goal was \$215,000.

Among the 219 teams that advocated on behalf of individuals affected by autism and their families, the Alex Eldreth Memorial Striders (some pictured here) consisted of Autism Delaware staff and their friends and family. “Like the members of all the teams that participated this year, each did what he or she could to help make a success of the walk, from making a personal donation and fundraising to walking and volunteering,” says Autism Delaware development director David Woods. “This is truly a community event.”

A number of sponsors are also responsible for the walk’s success. Listed on the Autism Delaware website, they include the Brandywine Center for Autism, Swift Pools, Lorne & Sharon Solway, Dover Tents & Events, Continuum, High Road School, Atlantic Millwork & Cabinetry, Pyramid Educational Consultants, FG International Solutions, Del-One, Nuclear Electric Insurance Limited, Re/Max, Benchmark Transmission, D.R.’s Lawn Maintenance, LLC; Tybout, Redfearn & Pell; the Bellmoor; and John F. Kleinstuber & Associates, Inc.

Record number of autism advocates met with their state legislators at this year's Smart Cookie Day

Autism Delaware policy and program coordinator Sarah Young directed a record number of autism advocates to their elected officials in Delaware's Legislative Hall during Smart Cookie Day on April 11. Visiting with their own state senators and representatives, 50 autism advocates were given the opportunity to share their personal stories and appeal for new legislation designed to improve life for people with autism and their families. The advocates also hand-delivered freshly baked cookies. Each cookie was designed with the face of a constituent with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

The legislation highlighted during the visit included

- House Bill (HB) 48, which expands state funding for basic special education to include kindergarten through the third grade.
- full funding for HB104. Underfunded when passed in 2018, HB104 mandates wage increases for direct support professionals (DSPs) who work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disorders.

Another important issue was addressed: a mandatory orientation period for in-home services provided by a certified nursing assistant (CNA). Advocates are calling for CNA certification and recertification to require autism training for both in-home and facility-based services.

Later in the day, the families mingled with their elected officials at Fraizer's Restaurant in Dover. Like earlier in Leg Hall, the meet-and-greet event offered an opportunity for families and self-advocates to share information about autism and how it affects their lives.



"At Smart Cookie Day, I met a couple who moved here from New Jersey because, for years, Autism Delaware has championed education and support services for families affected by autism spectrum disorder [ASD]. These folks had never attended Smart Cookie Day before but felt it important to attend this year and do their share to support families affected by ASD."

—Janet L. Berry
Autism Delaware
Associate Executive Director

Taking the opportunity Continued from p. 2

I would like to take this opportunity to say thanks to outgoing board president Pete Bradley. Having completed his three-year term this past December, Pete left the organization in great shape. Under Pete's leadership, Autism Delaware thrived, so thank you, Pete, for all you've done. I've got some big shoes to fill, and I'll do my best to fill them.

I can still hear opportunity knocking! As Autism Delaware continues to work its mission, I look forward to meeting and working with as many people as I can in the autism community. By working together, each of us doing what we can, we can succeed at Autism Delaware's mission, which is to help people and families affected by autism spectrum disorder. And this is an opportunity we can't afford to miss.

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Helping People and Families Affected by Autism

Did you know?

Todd Muñoz combined his love of dance and his love for his brother with autism to create DelAWAREness. This dance showcase has raised \$100,000 over the last three years, all to support Autism Delaware's programs and services.

How can you create something new to support Autism Delaware?

- Step 1:** Focus on your loved one with autism.
- Step 2:** Add your love for an activity or pastime.
- Step 3:** Mix together, and create autism awareness as only you know how.

If you need help getting started, call Autism Delaware's development team at (302) 224-6020.

Save the date: Sept. 20



Now available:
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AutismDelaware.org