

# **HEAD'S UP! FROM THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

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## **Be Included, "Together We're Better"**

### **4TH ANNUAL NATIONAL INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS Essay and Poster Contest**

The Arc of Maryland, Inc., in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education, the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, and the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education is pleased to announce the Third Annual "Together We're Better" Essay and Poster Contest. The purpose of the contest is to raise awareness during National Inclusive Schools Week. The 4th Annual National Inclusive Schools Week will be celebrated December 6-10, 2004 in classrooms, schools, and communities throughout the country. The Week recognizes the nation's progress and promotes action towards increasing the capacity of schools and communities to provide a quality education to an increasingly diverse student population, particularly those who have disabilities.

This year, the theme is "working together" for systemic change. Systemic change is not a process that occurs in isolation. Families, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school personnel, state and local administrators, and community members must reach out across all levels of the system to improve the quality of education for students with disabilities and create inclusive communities for all children.

Details of the Essay and Poster Contest can be found at [www.thearcmd.org](http://www.thearcmd.org). We invite you to download the entry forms and this year's Celebration Kit. For further information, contact Tonia Ferguson at (410) 974-6139 or [tferguson@thearcmd.org](mailto:tferguson@thearcmd.org).

## **The Feds Are Coming! The Feds Are Coming!**

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) will be coming to Maryland on March 15-17, 2005 for a verification visit to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). In prior years, monitoring by OSEP has focused mainly on procedural issues, however the next visit to Maryland will be to look at MSDE's

implementation of its improvement plan with respect to least restrictive environment. MSDE had established a steering committee to deal with self-assessment, coordinate data collection, and develop improvement plans. This steering committee will start meeting again in order to be prepared for the Feds in March.

#### Next steps for Local Chapters

- ❖ Identify the problems and best educational practices being used in your local school systems.
- ❖ Collect specific examples of where the system is and is not working as regards to the least restrictive environment.
- ❖ Recruit parents and students to call in or testify at the OSEP Public Forums.

Continue to look for further information from The Arc of Maryland.

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## **IDEA UPDATE- They're officially gone**

The U.S. House and Senate have adjourned until November 15, 2004, at which time a "lame duck" session will convene to address a variety of unfinished business. IDEA reauthorization is one of the key pending issues. The U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate have appointed the conference committee to negotiate the IDEA reauthorization bill. The Senate appointed all members of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee to the joint House-Senate Conference Committee. Senator Barbara A. Mikulski (D-MD) has been appointed to the Conference Committee.

Reach out to your family members, your friends, your neighbors and your state and local elected officials and urge them to assist us in protecting our children's rights. We need to keep a loud, clear, continuous message.

Both House and the Senate Bill fail to protect many critical rights in IDEA!!

- ❖ *We need accountability*
- ❖ *Don't weaken our right.*
- ❖ We need short-term objectives in the IEP process

***We need you to Contact your Maryland Senator!!!***

***Senator Barbara Mikulski: [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov)***

Visit The Arc of United State's Action Center and write a letter. Go to The Arc's main website at <http://thearc.org>. Scroll down and click on the Action Center logo on the left. This will take you to The Arc legislative Action Center

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## **Special Education Citizen Advisory Committees (SECAC) - Regulations are Approved!!**

According to both federal and state law, the development of an IEP must be a collaborative effort among students with disabilities, families, educators, administrators, and community members. This will require building strong relationships with local schools systems, which is essential to effective educational advocacy.

Thanks to over 107 individuals and organizations who testified in favor of the SECAC regulations (COMAR 13AA.05.02.13). The regulations were unanimously passed by the State Board of Education. These regulations will allow families, community organizations, agencies/school-based personnel and local school systems to focus on improving and/or enhancing opportunities for students receiving special education services. To learn more about your local SECAC, please visit the Resource page of the Family Networks website: [www.family-networks.org](http://www.family-networks.org) or contact Tonia Ferguson via email: [tferguson@thearcmd.org](mailto:tferguson@thearcmd.org).

**Don't forget it's all about building strong Partnerships.**

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## **Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) Taskforce on Comparable Assessments**

The Maryland State Board of Education passed a resolution authorizing the formation of a task force to investigate comparable assessments to the Maryland High School Assessments for students with disabilities. Parents and advocates are included on the Task Force, as well as educators, administrators, and representatives from other stakeholders groups across the state. Tonia Ferguson, Director of Education & Legal Advocacy serves as The Arc of Maryland representative to ensure the needs of students with disabilities needs are visible.

The resolution charges the task force with answering the following questions:

- ❖ What would be the requirement of a comparable measure of student achievement?
- ❖ How would such a measure be available?
- ❖ What are the estimated costs associated with comparable assessments in Maryland?

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## Seclusion and Restraint

The Mental Hygiene Administration has been leading a workgroup to look at revising Maryland's regulations governing the uses of seclusion and restraint for children in hospitals, residential treatment centers, group homes and shelters. The regulations would govern:

- ❖ Seclusion
- ❖ Mechanical restraint
- ❖ Physical restraint
- ❖ Therapeutic hold
- ❖ Chemical restraint

This is a very important issue, as we know many children are injured physically and emotionally from these practices. This is also a very complex issue as there are also federal laws and accrediting standards that facilities must meet.

There will be a special meeting on *Friday, October 22, 2004*  
9:30 - 11:30 a.m.

*Maryland Coalition of Families for Children's Mental Health*  
10632 Little Patuxent Pkwy #119  
Columbia, MD 21044  
410.730.8267

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## The Barber Report- Adhering to the Law in Baltimore County

Dr. Louis Barber, a private educational consultant, presented the results of his evaluation of the BCPS Special Education Program in May 2004. Dr. Barber spent a year visiting classrooms, schools, educators and administrators. He regularly consulted the Citizen's Advisory Committee for Special Education and studied the overall practices and procedures of the BCPS Special Education Program.

Dr. Barber recommended that BCPS do the following:

- ❖ Revise staffing practices to anticipate special education staffing needs.
- ❖ Increase the placement of students with disabilities in their home schools.
- ❖ Develop a comprehensive Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Plan; including a short and a long- range plan to accommodate students in their home school.
- ❖ Implement a plan for training IEP Teams to ensure their understanding of the law and implementation of the new direction for serving students in their home school.
- ❖ Include accountability for implementing Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in the evaluation procedures of school principals and other school administrators.

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We're on the Web!  
[www.thearcmd.org](http://www.thearcmd.org)

Young Children's  
Mental Health Policy  
Conference  
2004  
Wednesday  
November 3rd 8:00  
a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Holiday Inn Timonium

Provide sufficient staffing and other incentives for school administrators to bring students with IEPs back to their home schools.

## Department of Disabilities

The Maryland Department of Disabilities (DOD) assumes its place today as the eighteenth cabinet-level department within the Executive Branch of the Ehrlich Administration. In response to the pressing need for reform within the disability service delivery system, Governor Ehrlich has outlined a bold initiative to improve, consolidate, and unify disability services. The department is empowered to implement reform aimed at eliminating barriers that impede the independence, integration, and productivity of people with disabilities. Kristen Cox is the Secretary Designee of the new DOD.

## GET OUT VOTE!!

People with disabilities are a growing force in America politics. Let political candidates and other leaders know that

**YOUR VOICES COUNT!!!**

## WATCH FOR!!!

Date	Event/Details
10/26/04 11:00 am	The Arc of Maryland Education Committee Meeting: The Arc of Howard County
10/26/04 7:00 pm	Writing Successful IEP's-Focus on Goals and Objectives: White Oak School - (410) 887-5443
11/09/04 9:30 am	Preschool- Understanding Special Education: Greenwood Campus-Baltimore County Board of Education
11/11/04 7:00 pm	Exploring Guardianship Issues: Greenwood Campus-Baltimore County Board of Education
11/13/04 9:00 am	Understanding Special Education helps parents become more informed about the IEP process-White Oak School- (410) 887-5443

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**The Arc of Maryland works to create a world where children and adults with cognitive and developmental disabilities have and enjoy equal rights and opportunities.**