

## ANCS Special Needs Committee

### A proposal

#### Background:

Amy Damiani and Lisa Roberson met with Leslie Wolfe, former chair of Morningside Elementary School's Special Needs Committee. There were other moms there as well who were interested in starting similar committees at their schools.

Through listening to the other moms and their experiences, Amy and I learned that we are very fortunate at ANCS to be able to have an open and honest dialogue with the administration and Special Education Department and that some of the challenges that were experienced at the other schools do not apply to us.

At the other schools – the Special Needs Committees are under the PTA/PTSA/PTO. We are ambivalent about this and feel that this committee could report to the PTCA, Special Education, the Board, as we plan to keep everyone apprised of our plans and progress.

#### Funding Needs:

The committee appears to require very little funding as most of the functions are coffees, lunch and learns (bring your own lunch), and evening meetings. There would be some copies that we would request to have go into packets to parents entering the RTI/SST/Academic Assistance programs, as the ANCS Administration and/or Special Education Department deems appropriate. These kinds of documents would include a newsletter or an invitation to join our committee.

Any fundraising that would need to be done would be in accordance with the school's Fund Development Policy.

#### Goals and Objectives:

Our goal is for our committee to be a positive addition to ANCS. We would like to serve as an educational resource to parents whose children have an identified disability or are struggling academically or otherwise. We would achieve this by having coffees, lunch and learns, and/or evening meetings. At these meetings, which would probably be three per year, we would have speakers about a particular challenge/disability, resources in the community, and allow for updates on district issues affecting children with special needs.

Parents of children with learning differences/disabilities provide a great resource to each other in sharing information and experiences. We would like foster communication between parents so that parents of Special Needs children do not feel overwhelmed and isolated, particularly as they enter the SST process. We would like to provide such networking opportunities and also have designated parents who can serve as a resource that the school can refer parents who have questions, or just need to talk.

We would like to provide the school with a Special Needs Committee Packet that would be included with any information given to a parent entering the SST process. Additionally, we would like to suggest that the school get and give out copies of "Advocating for Your Child's Education" (revised by Jean M. Estes, Esq., June 2008) to all parents starting the SST process. Copies can be obtained through APS's

Learning Center at Kennedy Middle School. Copies of the book are free and include information on the Laws; Identification, Referral and Evaluation Process; Individual Education Plans; Resolving Disagreements; and Organizations.

We would like to provide support to the Special Education team through the following:

- ∞ Designated Special Education Room Parent
- ∞ Provide snacks on a schedule like the “regular” classrooms
- ∞ Utilize their knowledge and experience to help with the focus and direction of the Special Needs Committee

One of the things that all the people who attended the Special Needs Committee meeting with Leslie Wolfe agreed upon was that our Special Education Teachers are wonderful and know their stuff. However, we all felt that teacher general knowledge of special needs needed improvement. We realize that differs from teacher to teacher; however, we would like to facilitate/encourage/help with the education of ANCS’s general classroom teachers and administrators on various special needs issues. Perhaps that could be accomplished by presentations during teacher work days, educational videos, etc.

#### Inclusive Schools Week:

This week is December 5-9, 2011, and is “an annual event sponsored by the Inclusive Schools Network (ISN) at Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), which is held each year during the first week in December. Since its inception in 2001, Inclusive Schools Week has celebrated the progress that schools have made in providing a supportive and quality education to an increasingly diverse student population, including students who are marginalized due to disability, gender, socio-economic status, cultural heritage, language preference and other factors. The Week also provides an important opportunity for educators, students, and parents to discuss what else needs to be done in order to ensure that their schools continue to improve their ability to successfully educate all children.”

([www.inclusiveschools.org](http://www.inclusiveschools.org))

We would like for ANCS to designate the week of December 5-9, 2011 as Inclusive Schools Week. Since time is short, we would like to keep it simple and low key.

In that regard, we would like to plan some activities such as offering facts about various learning differences at Morning Meeting (i.e., how many children ANCS serves, what to do if you are worried about your child’s learning or behavior) and be mentioned in the principals’ weekly messages in the courier.

FYI – Lisa has a poem on being dyslexic. It was written and read by a young woman at last year’s International Dyslexia Association of Georgia’s meeting – so perhaps reading that or sharing it on the school’s website would be appropriate.

We would like to have a Friday coffee on the morning of December 9 to “introduce” ANCS’s Special Needs Committee.

We are uncertain what we should do at the middle campus and hope that you can help us with some ideas for that.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. We welcome your comments and suggestions.