









**STARTING SMART: TIPS FROM HASTINGS SEPTA PARENTS
FOR CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DIFFERENCES
AUGUST 2013**

ALL GRADES

-  Review IEP/504 plan for accuracy; contact Deborah Augarten if changes are needed; ***if possible, this should be done prior to the start of the school year.***
-  If your child is new to the school or building, parents are strongly encouraged to meet with the building principal or assistant principal to discuss your child and his or her special needs. Also take him or her on a tour of the new building before the year starts, showing them the gym, lunchroom/cafeteria, office, and perhaps even their classroom.
-  Parents are encouraged to routinely request copies of their child's current assessments (both formal and informal) and teacher's observation notes demonstrating their child's progress towards meeting their IEP goals and overall knowledge. These assessments drive teacher instruction and are a solid way for parents to gauge their child's achievement and support their child's development. These assessments should be available during all parent-teacher conferences and periodically throughout the school year to enhance parent/teacher partnership, communication and accountability to ensure your child's success.

HILLSIDE

-  It is a very good idea to schedule a meeting w/ teacher (and providers, if necessary) to introduce your child and share any special concerns, goals or other information; if you are returning to the same providers, it is a nice idea to give a summer update.
-  Ask for the name of your child's team leader/case manager; this will be the main contact person to relay concerns to his/her team throughout the year.
-  Reach out to special area teachers, if necessary, to share details, goals, concerns, etc.
-  Once school has started, request your child's schedule of services (OT, PT, speech, counseling, etc.).
-  Speak with your child's teacher about a communication log/newsletter/note (something concrete) that could be sent home on weekly or monthly indicating the topics of instruction/skill focus for that time period to facilitate carry over to home which parents can support and to monitor progress against goals.

MIDDLE SCHOOL AND HIGH SCHOOL

- ✓ If your child is starting middle school, have them start practicing with a combination lock over the summer to learn how to use a locker.
- ✓ If applicable, contact your child's Resource Room teacher – either by email or phone – to introduce yourself as the primary (parent) contact and share any special concerns, goals or other information relating to your child. The Resource Room teacher will be the main contact person to relay concerns throughout the year.
- ✓ Because the high school gives each student leeway in terms of school supplies, talk to your child about what supplies make the most sense for them. Are they more comfortable with individual spiral-bound notebooks for each subject or would they prefer binders? Given the block schedule of classes, many students go with two large binders (ACE and BDF). Take some time to help them come up with a system of organization prior to the start of school.
- ✓ It is important to know going in that there is an 'optional' period every day after school (2:45 - 3:15) for extra help. Sometimes these periods are very quiet and sometimes they are very crowded, with lots of students using them. Your child should make regular use of them, but if these periods are not useful because of the number of students in the room, speak to the principal about getting extra, quiet time for your student.
- ✓ Encourage your child to use their agenda book. Homework assignments that are not written down may not be completed. If poor motor skills are an issue, your child can ask if they can use their cell phones to take a photo of each day's class assignments on the blackboard. Your child's Resource Room teacher can help support your child with using the agenda book as well.
- ✓ If a particular subject is difficult for your child, encourage them to proactively seek help from the teacher – during a free period, lunch or after school – before they get too far behind.
- ✓ If your child's handwriting is impacting their note taking, talk to the Guidance Department and/or building principal about whether s/he can use a laptop during school.
- ✓ Since your high school child's schedule includes many classes and many teachers, encourage him or her to email each teacher prior to the start of school. S/he can introduce herself and reiterate what accommodations s/he may have. This is particularly important if the student has testing accommodations.
- ✓ If your child has testing accommodations, make sure that s/he talks privately with EACH TEACHER during the first week of school (before or after class, or after school) to see how this teacher will be handling his/her accommodations. For students that get time-and-a-half, some teachers ask that the child write a note on the top of the unfinished test (saying that they need more time) and finish the exam after school; others will permit the student to finish during lunch or some

other free period. It's best to cue your child to have a discussion about this before the first exam, as students who haven't made arrangements may rush to finish during the class period and will therefore not take the full allotment of time to which they are entitled. ***IN MOST CASES, IN HIGH SCHOOL THE TEACHER WILL NOT ASK THE STUDENT IF THEY NEED MORE TIME – THE STUDENT MUST LET THE TEACHER KNOW THAT MORE TIME IS NEEDED.***



If your child is even considering taking the SATs in the future, have them apply for testing accommodations ***IMMEDIATELY*** upon entering high school. The College Board will assess whether your child will have accommodations for the SATs and s/he will maintain this status throughout high school, *even if they are subsequently de-classified*. (Note that the ACT, another college entrance exam, requires that the student submit their accommodation requests immediately prior to taking the actual exam and this must be done EACH TIME your child takes the ACT. So, unlike the SAT, your child cannot apply in advance for accommodations to the ACT.)



As your child moves from middle school into high school, talk to them about how they should begin to take a more proactive role in their education, which also means that they must begin to advocate for themselves, including by participate in his or her IEP annual review.



Beginning in 9th grade, talk to your child about what their post-secondary plans might look like: Would they be interested in a vocational career, or would they like to attend either a two-year or four-year college? If your child is leaning toward a vocation, set up a meeting with their Guidance Counselor to explore available options (BOCES classes, other resources for training, outside part-time jobs or potential internships).



If your child has an IEP and is turning 15, make sure that Transition Planning is covered in their IEP. This means that the IEP team must develop measurable goals for the student that are focused on the post-secondary world, and must specify what transition services are needed to help the student reach those goals.



If college is in your child's future, investigate colleges that are test-optional (no SATs or ACTs required) at <http://www.fairtest.org/university/optional>. Almost all US colleges and universities now offer services such as drop-in writing assistance or on-campus tutoring. If your child needs more assistance, the Hastings High School Guidance Department has put together a list of colleges with comprehensive LD programs; see the link below. There are several resource books available that discuss LD services at the college level. Your child's Guidance Counselor can help identify a list of schools appropriate to your child's needs.

<http://www.hohschools.org/cms/lib07/NY01913703/Centricity/Domain/463/LD%20School%20List.pdf>