

Special Education Department

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### April Is AUTISM Month



## Growing our Services...

### A note from Dr. Deena Hill



I wanted to give our parents some exciting information as we plan for the 17-18 school year. We are making some changes at the high school level to better serve our students and model best practice special education services. We have received many parent concerns about their high school child having to be transferred to another campus for a particular program or service. In an effort to better serve our students at the high school level, we are serving our students who receive SAILS and ABC services (students with development delays who have intellectual disabilities and/or autism) at their home high school campuses next year. Depending on the number of students that need services in a specialized setting, we may have three to four specialized classrooms on a given campus to serve their student population. The exciting part about this change is that students will be served on their home campus allowing them to be part of their community without being transferred to another school for a particular program or service.

For next year, the only service we will not have at each of our 11 traditional high schools is the FLASH program (students who are medically fragile and require nursing services and have other significant needs). Students who require this type of programming and services may have to move to another high school as we will only have this program/service at four high school campuses.

As far as students with more significant behavior needs who are served with Behavior Support Services (BSS), they will also be able to be served on their home high school campus as we will also have these services at each of our eleven high school campuses. However, if these students must be removed from the general education environment and served in a specialized classroom, it will *not* be the same classroom as the students with development delays who have intellectual disabilities and/or autism.

I wanted all parents to have this general information. We will be contacting each family by phone that will be impacted by these changes and work through any individual issues as they arise. We will be posting an updated list of all special education programs / services by campus on our website soon. If you have any questions about this information, please do not hesitate to contact either your campus special education department or the Special Education Department at M. R. Wood (281-634-1143).

## Growing our Staff...

### Sheri Maston joins the FBISD Special Education Team



**Mrs. Sheri Maston**  
FBISD Director of Special Education

Sheri Maston was named Director of Special Education at the March 6, 2017 Board Meeting and started her new role with us on Monday, March 27th. Sheri comes to FBISD as an experienced education professional whose career spans more than 19 years. As she has followed her husband's professional career over the past 19 years, she has been fortunate to gain a wide variety of experience in five different states: Louisiana, Georgia, Oklahoma, New Jersey and Texas. She has both general education and special education teaching experience and most recently, she served as a Special Education Instructional Specialist for Pasadena ISD.

Sheri is excited about the opportunity to meet and work with the diverse and talented staff, students, and families in Fort Bend ISD. She is aware of the challenges that lay ahead but feels she is fully equipped to play a key role in further developing an inclusive culture on each campus where we strive for positive learning outcomes for all FBISD students.

The Fort Bend Independent School District, an Equal Opportunity Educational Provider and Employer, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, sex, national origin, disability and/or age, military status, genetic information, or any other basis prohibited by law in educational programs or activities that it operates or in employment decisions. Additionally, the District does not discriminate against an employee or applicant who acts to oppose such discrimination or participates in the investigation of a complaint related to a discriminatory employment practice. Employment decisions will be made on the basis of each applicant's job qualifications, experience, and abilities. Policies DAA, DIA

# A P R I L

# AUTISM AWARENESS MONTH

Nearly a quarter century ago, the Autism Society launched a nationwide effort to promote autism awareness, inclusion and self-determination for all, and assure that each person with ASD is provided the opportunity to achieve the highest possible quality of life. This year the Autism Society wants to go beyond simply promoting autism awareness to encouraging friends and collaborators to become partners in movement toward acceptance and appreciation. National Autism Awareness Month represents an excellent opportunity to promote autism awareness, autism acceptance and to draw attention to the tens of thousands facing an autism diagnosis each year. We want to get one step closer to a society where those with ASDs are truly valued for their unique talents and gifts. Join us in celebration for 2017 National Autism Awareness Month!



**What is Autism?** According to the Autism Society, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex developmental disability; signs typically appear during early childhood and affect a person’s ability to communicate, and interact with others. ASD is defined by a certain set of behaviors and is a “spectrum condition” that affects individuals differently and to varying degrees. There is no known single cause of autism, but increased awareness and early diagnosis/intervention and access to appropriate services/supports lead to significantly improved outcomes. Some of the behaviors associated with autism include delayed learning of language; difficulty making eye contact or holding a conversation; difficulty with executive functioning, which relates to reasoning and planning; narrow, intense interests; poor motor skills and sensory sensitivities. Again, a person on the spectrum might follow many of these behaviors or just a few, or many others besides. The diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder is applied based on analysis of all behaviors and their severity.

Under IDEA, autism is defined as: .....a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engaging in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. Not every student identified with ASD is served in special education. The child’s educational performance must be adversely affected by these characteristics to be identified as a student in need of special education services. Many students identified with an ASD are successful with Section 504 accommodations or are able to successfully master grade level expectations with no additional supports / services.

To access the NICHCY Autism Fact Sheet, [click here](#).



**The Autism Awareness Ribbon** — The puzzle ribbon was adopted in 1999 as the universal sign of autism awareness. Although this image is a trademark of the Autism Society, the organization has granted use to other non-profit organizations in order to demonstrate unity and advance a universal mission as opposed to any individually held interests or promotion of a single organization.



**Puzzle Piece** — The puzzle pattern reflects the complexity of the autism spectrum. The different colors and shapes represent the diversity of the people and families living with the condition. The brightness of the colors signals hope — hope that through increased awareness of autism, and through early intervention and access to appropriate services/supports, people with autism will lead full lives able to interact with the world on the own terms. As research continues, our hope is that each piece will come together until one day, we will understand the mystery of ASD!

**Light It Up Blue** — Each April 2nd, Autism Speaks celebrates the start of its signature campaign, Light It Up Blue, along with the international autism community in recognition of UN sanctioned World Autism Awareness Day and April, World Autism Month.



Thousands of iconic landmarks and buildings join the hundreds of thousands of homes and communities around the world to “light blue” in support of people living with autism. Autism-friendly events and educational activities take place all month to increase understanding and acceptance and further support people with autism. The Children’s Museum of Houston is honoring Light It Up Blue all month in April. If you wear blue and mention Autism Awareness Month, you will get \$2 off your admission ticket!

For more information on ASD click on the following links: [Autism Society](#) [National Autism Center](#) [Autism Speaks](#)

# 2017 Parent Involvement Survey

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), Section 6161(b)(2)(B), requires states to collect data from districts and charter school in order to respond to many of the State Performance Plan (SPP) indicators on annual basis. SPP Indicator 8 requires the Texas Education Agency (TEWA) to collect parent involvement information for students receiving special education services. Since Fall 2006, the TEA and Region 9 Education Service Center have distributed parent involvement surveys to a number of districts and charter schools based on student demographics reflected in the Public Education information Management System (PEIMS) data submission.

Most districts in Texas will only be included in the survey sample once within the six-year SPP timeframe (2012—2018). Because Fort Bend Independent School District is considered a “larger” district based upon an average daily membership of over 50,000 students, select FBISD campuses are included in this survey each year. Students within each TEA identified campus have been randomly selected to receive a survey. In early April, the district will receive packets addressed to individual students selected from the TEA’s Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Each packet will be addressed to the “Parent of Student’s Name” and contain the following:

1. A letter from TEA
2. Copy of the survey (paper and online completion option)
3. 2 open-ended questions
4. Postage marked return envelope
5. If the student’s home language identifies Spanish as the language spoken at home, an English and Spanish survey will be sent to the parent.



**Only TEA selected FBISD campuses / families will receive this survey.** If you receive this survey, we encourage you to complete and return the survey by May 19, 2017 to assist in our state’s continuous improvement efforts. For additional information regarding the Parent Survey or the Parent Coordination Network, [click here](#).

## Co-Teach Corner



Lantern Lane Elementary

Co-teach partners Cherry Choi (left) and Brittney Caldwell (right)



When you walk into the 5<sup>th</sup> grade co teach classroom at Lantern Lane Elementary, there is no distinction between the Special Education and General Education teacher, because this team truly works in harmony. They service all students in their co teach classroom for Reading, ELA, and Math throughout the day. They can be found providing instruction using the parallel teaching model, where the class is divided in two equal groups with each teacher. They can also be found in station teaching, where each teacher holds small group instruction and some students are also at their desk for independent work. What is remarkable is that the students in their class respond to both teachers equally and as true partners in their learning.

Cherry Choi has been teaching for 6 years, and shares that she loves working with the kids, especially watching the students learn, and their interaction with adults and peers. She especially enjoys the funny stories that the students provide, which can be very entertaining. Choi noted that this year’s co-teach experience has been fun and amazing and said, “I’ve gained a partner in the classroom.”

Brittney Caldwell has been teaching for 2 years, and was a paraprofessional for 1 year prior to teaching. “I’ve always had a passion for helping others, especially those who require the most help, which is why I chose to work with children. With children, I am able to mold them into future leaders. There’s nothing like seeing the difference I’ve made in the lives of my students. To me, it’s not just a job, but a commitment I’ve chosen to see the growth of these young minds. When I am able to get through to my students and see their eyes light up with curiosity and amazement, it reminds me of what brought me into teaching.” Caldwell shared that co-teach is a great example of how “Teamwork makes the dream work!” Caldwell and Choi have done a terrific job coming together to find the best solutions to meet the needs of their 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. While in the classroom Caldwell notes that, “We do an awesome job at respecting each other and modeling leadership skills that we hope our students will take in and use one day.” This experience has showed the teachers and students that effective collaboration and continuous communication are the keys to becoming a successful team and achieving the goal of student academic achievement!







Fort Bend ISD continues the long standing tradition of participating in the Lil' Rustlers Rodeo. On March 5th, 10 of our elementary SAILS classes made a special trip to this amazing experience. This unique part of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo gives children with special needs the opportunity to be a rodeo "cowboy" or "cowgirl" for a day as they interact with playful stick horse races, seesaws turned into bulls and rope hay barrels resembling steers as well as actively engage in many common cowboy "chores".



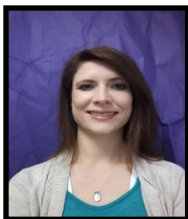
## Special Education Teachers Going Above & Beyond!

This year, FBISD is undergoing a curriculum rewrite and reorganization. In order to sustain the inclusive practices within our district, Special Education is part of the Curriculum Writing project and team. This gives the ability to input helpful strategies and accommodations for students with disabilities, in all content areas and all grade levels. As part of this teamwork building, four amazing and generous Special Education teachers joined the Curriculum team! They are giving up their time beyond school hours and regular duties, to help assist with the curriculum writing process. This has been a tremendous undertaking, as well as eye opening to watch these teachers share their knowledge and skills. They are able to input instructional tips and tools that will help teachers better meet the needs of all students in their instruction. Thank you to our fabulous teachers!



**Imrana Ahmad** is currently a Resource/Co-Teacher at Rita Drabek Elementary School. She is in her 12<sup>th</sup> year of education. She shares, "I chose teaching because I wanted to make a difference in the lives of my students and choose a career with a deep sense of purpose. I knew as a teacher, I'd have many opportunities to teach content, curriculum, and knowledge. However more so, I knew I'd also be able to build student confidence, teach them skills, morals, compassions and kindness to be successful in life as good citizens. I also was certain that by practicing all of the above, I'd also see a personal growth that would make me a better educator!" Ahmad shares that her hopes for being a part of the district curriculum team are to "collaborate with the specialists to align curriculum and instruction by developing innovative best practices through accommodations, for new and veteran teachers in reaching success for all students through differentiation strategies."

**Regan Dean** is a Special Education/Resource ELA for Kinder through Fifth grade, at Quail Valley Elementary School. Dean is in her thirteenth year of Special Education. Dean attended Sam Houston State University and graduated with both General and Special Education specializations. She shares, "I strive to get all students excited about school and interested in learning about all things around them. I have high expectations for all of my students and for the people who work with them. All children should feel successful and fulfilled by their learning progress." We are so excited to have Dean's experience and enthusiasm on the curriculum team.



**Christy Laczkowski** is a Resource teacher at Holley Elementary. In only her first year in FBISD, she has already made quite an impact. "Education has always been a very big part of my family. My mom was the elementary librarian at my school, which meant I was always around the school. Education has been a passion of mine since I was a young girl... Special Education also quickly became my passion". After graduating from Texas A&M with high honors, Laczkowski worked as both a general and special education teacher in Texline ISD, Kelton ISD, and Damon ISD before coming to Fort Bend ISD. In regards to being part of the curriculum team, she shares, "I love that I have been blessed with the opportunity to be able to focus on helping struggling students at the elementary level after 5 years of working with students of all ages. Helping students every day, showing them that they are capable of so many things, and providing them a safe, comfortable environment is my choice, my passion, my life."

**Lisa Buckingham** has been a teacher for 31 years. She holds a Bachelor's of Science in Education from Southwest Texas State University and a Master's in Education from Grand Canyon University. Buckingham is in her 14<sup>th</sup> year at Townwest Elementary School, as a Special Education teacher with the Behavior Support Services. She has an amazing skill in shaping young minds along with molding good behavior strategies. Her knowledge and background brings the curriculum team a tremendous asset.



# Around Town...

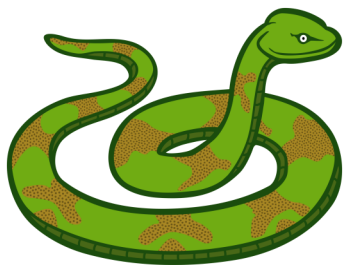


## Sugar Land's Earth Day Celebration

### Plaza at Sugar Land Town Center

**Saturday, April 1st 1:00—5:00 p.m.**

Earth Day is a day that was created to promote awareness and appreciation for the Earth's environment and occurs each year on **April 22<sup>nd</sup>**. The first Earth Day was in 1970 and was founded by U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-Wisconsin) as an environmental learning opportunity for school children. Today, over 193 countries now host events to demonstrate support for environmental protection. In Sugar Land, the Earth Day Celebration is called "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rock!" This event will feature a wide variety of performances, displays, demonstrations and activities for the entire family!



- **Live Performances by Vocal Trash (1:15 p.m. & 3:15 p.m.)**
- **Reptile Shows by Texas Snakes & More (2:15 p.m. & 4:15 p.m.)**
- **Eco-friendly displays and demonstrations**
  - **Interactive games**
  - **Educational Booths**
  - **Up-Cycle Art Contest**

If you can't make it out to celebrate Earth Day at Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rock, be sure to set some time aside as a family to rekindle your relationship with nature. Some quick, easy and FREE things to do to promote environmental awareness are: take a nature walk, watch the clouds, play an I SPY game outside where you focus on things in nature, or simply gaze upon the stars before going to bed. For additional information on the Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rock event or how to promote Earth Day in your home, go to the following:

[Free Online Earth Day Computer Games](#)

[Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Rock!](#)

[Scholastic's 6 Ways to Celebrate Earth Day](#)

## Sensory Friendly Night Space Center Houston



**Thursday, April 20, 2017 5:30 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.**

Many children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and Sensory Processing Disorders love space! However, visiting Space Center Houston with the general public can be an overwhelming experience for many of our students. Space Center Houston has designed an experience for children with special needs to visit without the crowds, loud sounds, or fancy lighting. You will be greeted by the same great staff and get to see the same amazing artifacts that makes Space Center Houston a world famous destination right in our home-town!

For more information on this incredible event or for ticket pricing, [click here](#) to visit the website.

## 2017 Strike Out Autism



**5<sup>th</sup> Annual Strike Out Autism  
Sunday, April 23<sup>rd</sup>**

**Opening Weekend with the Sugar Land Skeeters**

**For Family Registration, [click here](#).**