

Lewis-Palmer D-38 Special Education Advisory Committee, Sept. 11

# Technological advances assist students

By Harriet Halbig

Many parents and staff members attended the Sept. 11 meeting of the School District 38 Special Education Advisory Committee, where they learned of many technological aids and new procedures to aid special education students in the district.

Anne McGann, augmentative communication specialist, and speech language pathologist Cheryl Young gave a very informative presentation about devices that can be of help to students on an individual education program (IEP).

McGann explained that assistive technology is used to perform tasks that would be difficult or impossible for the student. Examples of this are the ability to write legibly or to read the printed word. A statewide alternative communications library of such devices is available to teachers and parents, allowing experimentation before specific devices are selected.

Student needs are evaluated in the classroom setting and helpful tools are then recommended.

Young demonstrated a tool known as a smart pen, which combines the ability to take notes and record a classroom lecture. When used on special paper, the pen allows a student to scan a portion of class notes and hear the lecture played back. The pen costs \$90 to \$100, and a few students own them.

McGann then introduced a number of useful apps for students. A list was distributed with titles and ratings

of apps that address various problems. Apps can assist a student in making a slideshow to illustrate a story (A.C. Slideshow), practice presentation voice (dBVolmMeter), create flashcards, and various other functions. A helpful app for parents is myIEP meeting, which allows parents to understand the laws related to special education, organization of paperwork, and how to support their student through the process.

Apps are available for students of all ages from early childhood to adulthood.

McGann and Young stressed that most apps are very inexpensive and many are free of charge. Where there is cost involved, they suggest looking for a "lite" version that is often free, and to look at earlier versions that might be superior to the most recent. Ratings are available for all apps, and it is recommended that parents choose apps with a rating of three stars or higher.

### Director's report

Director of Exceptional Student Services Mary Anne Fleury reported that many students are entering D-38 from other districts this year and others are changing schools within the district. Each teacher is supplied with a day planner, a list of what services to provide to each student, and information on inclusion in the general education classroom.

This list of services was created as a result of the May meeting of the committee, where parents requested various services to make the transition between grades and schools more uniform district-wide.

Fleury said that a focus for this year is student engagement in the general education classroom. It will be necessary to determine skills that make this engagement successful. Sometimes a student will need to be taught appropriate behavior outside of the classroom and then returned. The department is now committed to teach appropriate classroom behaviors to students while they are young, making it possible to integrate them early in their school years.

Fleury said that she will observe general education classrooms to monitor progress.

The department is now providing a multi-tiered system of support that encourages general education teachers to alter their teaching practices in order to enable special education students to learn in a general education setting. If this does not work for a specific student, teachers will look at additional interventions and support for the student.

Fleury also reported that disability labels are changing this year. Students with emotional disabilities may no longer qualify for special education services. Autism will be a separate category.

Fleury encouraged parents to go to teachers first when they have a question, then to the principal of their



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