Over its last two annual conferences, PBIDA has been very fortunate that its program committee, under the direction of Bill Keeney, Ph.D., CALP, Delaware Valley Friends School Director of Pedagogical Research and Faculty Development, has been able to arrange keynote presentations by two of the most distinguished neuroscientists currently studying dyslexia. Last year’s keynote speaker, Kenneth Pugh of the Yale Reading Center and Haskins Laboratory, described recent brain imaging research showing conclusively that those with a reading disability such as dyslexia have difficulty establishing stable, integrated reading centers in the brain, unlike typically developing readers.

In those with a reading disability, brain centers responsible for reading are not as active and not as well connected to other areas of the brain. This year’s conference keynote speaker, Laurie Cutting, is also affiliated with Haskins Laboratory as well as Vanderbilt University where she is Professor of Special Education, Psychology, Radiology, and Pediatrics, and a member of the Brain Institute and Center for Cognitive and Integrative Neuroscience. Dr. Cutting provided a fascinating update on findings from brain imaging research, including results from studies she and her colleagues are conducting. These studies focus on what we are learning about centers in the brain used for reading comprehension as well as word recognition, and on the connections between these reading centers and the brain’s executive function and language centers.

Dr. Cutting began her keynote address by noting that past brain imaging research has identified at least two, main centers in the brain devoted to reading words. Both are located in the brain’s left hemisphere, where language tasks are performed. One of these word recognition centers is used to convert the letters in the words we read into the sounds and words they represent (orthographic to phonological mapping, in the brain’s temperoparietal lobe). The other word-reading center is responsible for memory-based word recognition (and is located in the occipitotemporal lobe). There may also be a third center responsible for articulatory recoding (in the anterior region of the left hemisphere).

Dr. Cutting and others have found that these word-reading centers look different in those with a reading disability. For these individuals, both the letter-sound mapping and the memory-based word recognition areas of the brain are less active during word recognition. More recent brain imaging studies have shown that connections to the word-reading centers and other areas of the brain are also less robust (the brain’s white matter connections are poorer). Good, evidence-based reading instruction that includes a focus on the sound structure of the language, and that is presented in a systematic, explicit, and sequential manner, can improve the reading skills of those with a reading disability. This improved reading is reflected in greater activation and better connections in the brain’s reading centers, making them more like the word-reading centers of typical readers.

While most children with a reading disability respond to good, evidence-based instruction, there are some who do not. To understand and perhaps improve instruction for those who do not respond positively to instruction, Cutting and her (Continued on page 6)
Pittsburgh Region Conference
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Learning and Living with Dyslexia

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Nelson Lauver is an Author, Syndicated Broadcaster and Speaker.

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Letter from the President

It seems strange to be writing my last letter as PBIDA President, but probably stranger still to you who will be reading this in March when the new President, Lisa Goldstein has already been hard at work at the PBIDA helm for months.

As is frequently the case when stepping down from a position, I’ve been reflecting on the changes with PBIDA, dyslexia, literacy, etc. that have come along over the past years. One change that strikes me is the broadening of focus from dyslexia alone. The PBIDA mission statement emphasizes the need to increase awareness of dyslexia, and as awareness has increased, so has the interest in broadening the scope and impact of our work. I’m sure you have noticed that “literacy,” “dysgraphia”, and “dyscalculia” are included along with “dyslexia” in articles, research and presentations with increasing frequency. Our annual Fall conference included “literacy and learning”, not just dyslexia, and the sessions covered a broad range of topics that impact learning. The research into dyslexia over the years has resulted in better understanding of how people learn to read, and that understanding is now being applied in teaching all children to read, not just those who struggle with dyslexia. It is also broadening and deepening our knowledge of other areas of learning.

Another change involves the annual PBIDA conference. PBIDA will hold its Fall Conference again in October 2016, and there will be a chance in day and venue. As PBIDA has been extremely fortunate to have the strong support of the specialized schools in our area, for quite a few years now, the conference has been held at one of these host schools. Smaller schools without the physical capacity to host the conference support it through other sponsorship opportunities. In 2016, the Fall Conference will be held on Monday (a change from Friday), Columbus Day, October 10, 2016, and will be hosted at the McGuire Campus of St. Joe’s University on City Line Avenue. St. Joe’s is among the first universities to be accredited by IDA for its adherence to the IDA Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading. We are excited to have the opportunity to partner with a university.

Yet another change is the increasing presence of the PBIDA Pittsburgh regional group. They are a very dedicated and active group, and have put on two highly successful conferences, as well as a number of workshops. In the eastern region of our state, particularly in the Philadelphia area, we are used to many options for learning more about dyslexia, literacy and how people learn. The opportunities and resources in the western area of Pennsylvania are not as numerous, and the offerings sponsored by the Pittsburgh group are making a difference in that area.

As awareness of dyslexia has increased, so have efforts to improve the teaching of reading. More and more states are enacting legislation that impacts reading instruction in schools and the training requirements for the educators who do that teaching. Pennsylvania is among the states where action is being taken to look at what is necessary to ensure that all children learn to read. This is a change that requires legislation and in many cases extreme paradigm shifts. While important change may not happen quickly, the impetus is there, and PBIDA and other similar organizations are in the forefront to advocate for the necessary legislative action.

Certainly there are many more important changes related to dyslexia and learning that have taken place, and I cannot cite them all. You probably have your own list. The most important thing is that awareness and understanding of dyslexia and learning have increased significantly, and that understanding will continue to promote positive changes in our work and the lives of learners.

Julia Sadler

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Focus is published three times a year by the Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association. We welcome submissions of articles, Calendar of Events, The Heroes of Dyslexia, and advertising. Please submit to Tracy Bowes at dyslexia@pbida.org or (610)527-1548.

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Letter from the Editors

The Editorial Board is pleased to share this issue of Focus!

Following the highly successful, informative, and enjoyable PBIDA’s 37th Conference on Literacy and Learning Disabilities at Delaware Valley Friends School in October 2015, in this issue of Focus, we hope you enjoy the excellent summary of Dr. Laurie Cutting’s Keynote address. For those of you who were unable to attend, Dr. Cutting provided updates on brain imaging research related to word recognition and shared findings from her latest studies regarding neurobiology relevant to comprehension. We are so grateful to John Kruidenier, Ed.D. for writing such a helpful outline of the key ‘take home’ points for Focus readers, and we hope that you find the information relevant to your interest in and work with individuals with reading disabilities. Additional conference highlights include a recap of the Janet L Hoopes Award recipients, Children’s Dyslexia Centers in Pennsylvania, and the amazing services they provide to reading disabled individuals.

It is now time to focus (no pun intended) our attention to the upcoming Pittsburgh Regional Conference, Dyslexia Today 2016: Learning and Living with Dyslexia, which will be held on Saturday April 9th, 2016 at the Doubletree by Hilton, Monroeville Conference Center from 9 AM to 3:30 PM. For more information about the Pittsburgh conference, please see the Pittsburgh Regional Conference page which can be found on the PBIDA website (www.pbida.org). Nelson Lauver, author of Most Unlikely to Succeed, host and creator of The American Storyteller Radio Journal (2001 – 2010), and educational rights advocate, will deliver the conference Keynote Address, Don’t Give Up on That Kid. For this Focus issue, he offers some practical options for “compensatory” strategies and tools that dyslexic individuals can use to assist with writing.

This issue of Focus includes several additional useful articles. Bob Sager, M.Ed. provides another interesting piece in his ‘tech’ series – in this installment, he discusses life lessons that can be learned from ‘Google philosophy,’ and how these lessons can support students in becoming agents of change and schools in meeting the needs of all students, including those with learning differences. We are introducing a new series, Life After High School For Students with LD, which will feature articles about aspects of the transition from high school to life beyond unique to students with learning differences. Andrew DiPrinzio, The Director of the AIM Advantage, is kicking off the series with a piece describing the program he uses to support students transitioning to college. Stay tuned for additional articles regarding the college transition, as well as perspectives and guidance about other relevant topics, such as considering a ‘gap year’ and moving into the workplace. If you feel you need to relax after taking in all of the Focus articles, Robb Gaskins, PhD authored an excellent piece about benefits of mindfulness practices learned at a recent event offered by the new Benchmark School Center for Empowered Learning and presented by Dr. Michael Baime, Director of the UPenn Program for Mindfulness and Mind-Body Programs for the Abramson Cancer Center. As always, there are also updates on the incredible work being done via Experience Dyslexia, news from the Pittsburgh Region, and the Eastern Region Calendar of Events.

Finally, as many of you know, Kit Gordon-Clark, PhD, passed away on October 25th, 2015. In addition to her roles as teacher, mentor, colleague, advocate, and friend to many Focus readers, she was very active in the establishment of PBIDA. Thus, we pay tribute to Kit via an article authored by Nanie Flaherty, PhD in which she chronicles Kit’s full and generous life.

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Laughlin Children’s Center believes that all children are unique and deserve their own specialized path to learning success. That is why we take a multi-disciplinary approach to educational support.

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colleagues designed a study to look at both the neurobiological and behavioral characteristics of these “non-responders” as well as those who do respond well (“responders”). Measures for this study of 10-year-olds included brain imaging results and tests of reading ability, attention, and executive function obtained both before and after evidence-based reading instruction consisting of fifteen hours of an Orton-Gillingham-based reading program. They found that those children with a reading disability in the responders group had better metacognition ability than non-responders before instruction began. This behavioral difference was reflected in differences in the brain profiles of students before instruction as well. Those who would respond to instruction and improve their word recognition had better coordination between areas of the brain responsible for top-down executive functioning and the reading center responsible for word recognition before instruction began.

In her keynote, Dr. Cutting noted that most studies of the brain during reading, like those described above, have involved word recognition tasks. To keep everything as simple as possible during the complex task of having children read while undergoing a brain scan, only word recognition is typically measured (as isolated words are flashed in the child’s field of vision). Cutting and others have developed procedures that sequentially flash phrases from sentences one at a time in a way that simulates sentence reading. This allows researchers to know exactly which words participants are focused on throughout a sentence-reading task. Using this technique, Cutting and her colleagues designed a study to answer an important question: While word recognition difficulties are perhaps the most prevalent form of reading disability, what can brain imaging tell us about those students who have adequate word recognition but whose reading comprehension is very low? Sentence-reading as well as word-reading tasks are needed to best answer this question.

Dr. Cutting and her colleagues conducted the first true experimental study (one with adequate control groups) to look at word, phrase, and sentence reading using brain imaging in order to begin to understand how the brains of those with a disability in word recognition are different from those with a disability in reading comprehension (those with adequate word recognition but poor passage comprehension). This study of the neurobiology of reading comprehension in adolescent readers looked at (a) known language centers in the brain, (b) reading centers (those word recognition centers described above), and (c) areas of the brain responsible for executive functioning (top-down planning and monitoring of a task, for example). The study also looked at (d) connections between these areas of the brain (white matter connections). By looking at the areas or centers responsible for specific tasks and the connections between these centers, Cutting and her colleagues hoped to begin to understand similarities and differences in the neural networks active during word as opposed to passage reading, and how these networks are different in those with poor reading comprehension.

We know that language and executive function processes can affect reading. Readers access the meanings of words as they read and decide which comprehension strategies to use, for example. Results from Cutting’s study confirm that word reading activates word recognition centers in the brain along with word meaning areas (lexico-semantic areas), executive function areas, and the white matter connections between them. The reading comprehension that occurs during sentence reading activates these same word-level networks but also activates areas of the brain that support comprehension (areas in the left angular gyrus where information is combined and integrated). Those who are better at reading comprehension not only show greater activation of their brain’s reading networks (the reading centers and the connections between them), they also have better connections between these networks and separate language and executive function networks.

Dr. Cutting concluded her keynote by remarking how important it is for current and future neurobiological reading research to examine the distinct reading, language, and executive function networks in the brain and how they affect the success or failure of reading instruction for those with reading disabilities. Expanding the types of texts studied, from isolated words to sentences, passages, and even more complex narrative and expository texts has already started and will continue, making the reading tasks studied with brain imaging techniques more like those that students regularly engage in at schools.

Dr. John R. Kruidenier is a literacy and technology consultant and heads Kruidenier Education Consulting (KEC) in Horsham, Pennsylvania.
Kit Gordon-Clark  
1934-2015

Katherine Masella Gordon-Clark, or Kit, passed away on October 25 after a full and generous life. Kit was a friend, a mentor, a teacher, a professional colleague, and a tireless and effective advocate for children with learning disabilities.

Kit was born in Buffalo, New York, and moved with her family to Philadelphia as a child; she always considered herself a Philadelphian at heart. Kit attended Greene Street Friends and Germantown Friends Schools and then entered Bryn Mawr College on a full scholarship. She received her B.A. in English, Cum Laude, in 1956, her Masters, and then her Ph.D. in 1983, completing a dissertation titled Learning to Listen: A Study of the Development of Auditory Selective Attention in Seven-, Nine- and Eleven-Year Old Normal and Seven and Nine-Year Old Learning Disabled Children. Kit credited her husband Matthew for helping her to juggle the demands of academics and of raising a young child, her beloved son Nathaniel. In a reunion report Kit wrote “juggling many roles… would not have been possible without the support of my husband, who died unexpectedly in 1987 of a heart attack.”

Kit also wrote in the reunion report that she, as “the granddaughter of Italian immigrants, and the first woman in her family to go to college… wishes to thank an institution (Bryn Mawr College) that believes in and supports women in their many roles.” Kit remained very connected to Bryn Mawr College all her life and was an enthusiastic volunteer. Her many contributions included being Vice President of the Bryn Mawr College Alumnae Association (1974-77), Publicity Chairman of the BMC Antiques Show (1974), Class Collector for Campaign for 21 Million (elected by her classmates), Reunion Manager of the BMC Class of 1956 (elected by her classmates), and Chairman of the Alumnae Regional Scholarship Committee (1966-69). Kit was always involved in the class reunions, generously opening up her home to classmates and volunteering in many ways. One of Kit’s former students and mentees wrote “She embodied the true spirit of a Bryn Mawr woman who spoke her mind, brokered in graciousness, and shared openly of her knowledge, her heart, and her spirit. “

Kit began working at the Bryn Mawr College Child Study Institute (CSI) in 1977 and was there for the remainder of her professional career; she was Director of the Assessment Clinic and then Associate Director of CSI. Her specialty was in the assessment of learning disabilities and emotional struggles in young people, and she was a master in that field. A professional colleague who worked closely with Kit described her as “brilliant-she understood the assessment process and assessment measures both in theory and practice. Her ability to interpret test results to provide the best recommendations to help children manage and overcome their learning differences was superlative. Her reputation as an expert in assessment reached far and wide.” Another colleague said that “parents were grateful for her recommendations; they always requested that she do repeat evaluations of their children.”

For many years Kit taught the definitive graduate Assessment course, and supervised students and younger colleagues, and it was in this capacity that her gifts as a teacher and mentor were most apparent. Kit’s enthusiasm for understanding the relevant research, for conducting a comprehensive and compassionate evaluation of each child, and for teaching was contagious. A former student said of Kit: “Kit continually strived to be ‘at the top of her game’ in terms of her knowledge base and skills. Those who knew her will recall her vast collection of books, many of which were relevant to her field of study and work, and her frequent sharing of what she had learned from her readings around the lunch table. Those who were trained by her will recall the numerous journal articles assigned and the nuggets of knowledge learned that we all still carry with us today. Kit’s model in this regard taught me the benefit in striving to stay ‘at the top of my game,’ and the necessity of it to the children and families with whom I work.”

All of us who were supervised by Kit were very lucky. Kit was described by a former student as “that rare educator who could convey her expertise while still treating her students as emerging colleagues who were worthy of her respect and full consideration.” Kit’s standards were high and she inspired her students to maintain those standards. She created an atmosphere in which one could admit to mistakes while strategizing about how to correct them, always for the sake of the child and while maintaining the highest ethical standards. Another former student tells of a time when she sought Kit’s support after making a scoring error: “As I told her what happened, Kit leaned back in her chair and smiled with such warmth and kindness (those who worked with Kit can certainly picture this). She then…compassionately helped me problem-solve my dilemma.” Kit was generous with her time and always made herself available for support and supervision, whether at lunch over a salad or in her office behind closed doors. A colleague once said to me: “Kit was CSI.” She created an atmosphere of trust, safety and respect around the learning and supervision process.

Kit and her husband Matthew’s passion for helping those with dyslexia translated into early involvement in developing a state branch of the International Dyslexia Association (IDA) (then known as the Orton Society). The Greater Philadelphia Branch (now the Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association, PBIDA) was chartered in 1979. Matthew was Treasurer in the early years and Kit held various offices, including Vice-President in 1989 and Branch President in 1989-91. She was closely involved in organizing national meetings of IDA in Philadelphia in 1976, 1986 and 2004, remained actively involved with the branch well into the 21st century, and was on the National Nominating Committee in 2006-08. Kit always attended the National IDA meetings, and many of us have warm memories of joining her on those trips. In 1998 Kit received the PBIDA Janet Hoopes Award for her service to the community, an honor well deserved. Kit’s passion for learning, for giving, for teaching and for helping others touched many lives. She will be missed.

Eugenie W. Flaherty, Ph.D.
Learning to Pay Attention:  
How Mindfulness Practices Can Provide Benefits in School and Life  
By Robb Gaskins, Ph.D.

We live in a complex and ever-changing world. Functioning effectively in such a world requires a robust combination of cognitive strategies, conceptual knowledge, and executive skills. However, even more fundamentally, functioning with optimal efficiency and effectiveness also requires that we consistently demonstrate focus and clarity. Consequently, the development of focus and clarity is an integral part of the Benchmark instructional program. As such, the promotion of mindfulness practices that cultivate the development of focus and clarity was determined to be the topic we wanted to feature in our inaugural speaker event presented by the new Benchmark School Center for Empowered Learning.

The Speaker – Michael Baime, MD

Given the topic of mindfulness practices, there was no question as to whom we wanted to speak. We are fortunate to have one of the nation’s leading experts in mindfulness right here in Philadelphia. Dr. Michael Baime is a Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. In addition, he is the Director of the Penn Program for Mindfulness and the Director of Mind-Body Programs for the Abramson Cancer Center at the University of Pennsylvania Health System.

Since founding the Penn Program for Mindfulness in the early 90s, the program has enrolled more than 15,000 individuals in an acclaimed eight-week mindfulness-based training course. As stated on the Penn Program for Mindfulness website, this course is focused on helping participants:

- manage difficulty and stress
- reduce depression and anxiety
- cope with trauma and loss
- increase focus and mental clarity
- improve communication in relationships
- find purpose, meaning, and beauty in life

As if that weren’t enough, Dr. Baime has also published significant and compelling research on the benefits of mindfulness practices, and his tireless commitment to improving the quality of life of every individual has resulted in his being the 2016 recipient of the American College of Physicians’ Award for Distinguished Contributions in Behavioral Medicine. Given this background, it was clear that Dr. Baime was the person we needed, and we were thrilled and honored that he accepted the invitation to speak.

The Talk – Mindfulness for Life

More than 300 educators, parents, and community members from across the tri-state area packed into the A. Palmer West Performing Arts Center at Benchmark School to hear Dr. Baime present a talk entitled, “Mindfulness for Life: How Learning to Strengthen Attention Creates Lifelong Benefits.”

Dr. Baime described mindfulness using the definition provided by the person widely considered to be the most influential proponent of mindfulness practices in the United States, Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn – “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.” This definition highlights three critical characteristics of mindfulness:

1. **Intentionality** – Mindfulness entails consciously choosing the focus of our attention rather than allowing our attention to wander where it pleases. By focusing our attention on our breath, a sound, or anything, we gain an appreciation of just how untamed our mind is. In the process, we begin to realize that the vast majority of mental activity is comprised of thoughts and feelings that are separate from experience. By being aware of when our attention is drifting and redirecting our attention accordingly, we strengthen our ability to sustain our attention where we intend it to be.

2. **Being present** – While we only ever exist in the present moment, we spend an inordinate amount of time preoccupied with the past or future or attending to considerations outside of our immediate experience. As a result, we can become distanced from the world rather than genuinely experiencing it the only way we truly can - in this moment. Consequently, through mindfulness, we seek to return our attention to the present moment.

(Continued on page 9)
3. **Acceptance** – Due to our preconceptions and expectations, we are quick to evaluate and emotionally react to our interpretations of our experience. This includes self-criticism as we struggle to maintain our attention as we seek to do. Through mindfulness we dissipate judgment in favor of embracing our reactions.

While this description establishes the theoretical foundation of the concept, the only way to develop a true understanding of mindfulness is through experience in practice. Thus, Dr. Baime led the audience through a guided meditation experience. In doing so, he provided us with first-hand knowledge of the initial challenge of staying focused as well as some of the overarching and pervasive benefits of mindfulness practice, such as reduced stress and an enhanced sense of calm. It was a powerful experience.

Dr. Baime’s talk also included a review of quite a number of studies indicating various positive effects of mindfulness training. For example, he shared studies that have demonstrated that mindfulness training has led to increases in concentration, working memory, resistance to distraction, and GRE scores, among other benefits. In addition, Dr. Baime shared how engaging in mindfulness reduces stress over time. Essentially, with practice, mindfulness creates a buffer between events and one’s reaction. Where previously an event would lead to an immediate reaction, with repeated practice, adversity would be met with awareness and non-judgmental recognition of the event and a thoughtful response.

**The Response – The Reaction of Audience Members**

On the evening of the presentation there was clearly an energy and excitement in the room as Dr. Baime spoke. This feeling was reinforced by the outpouring of positive responses after the event. For example, current Benchmark parent Caren Lambert shared, “Michael Baime was a terrific speaker… I liked that part of his presentation was giving us a feel for what mindfulness practice is. (In addition,) I was very interested in the information he provided that showed the improvements in working memory.” She also noted that, “the brain scan images he showed during the presentation made his points more understandable to me.”

Angela Furtaw, another current Benchmark parent, shared similar appreciation for the quality of Dr. Baime’s presentation. Like Caren, she particularly appreciated when Dr. Baime guided the audience through mindfulness practice. “It actually had a calming, de-stressing effect…and I left the auditorium without the back pain I had been experiencing for days. I hope to continue to remind myself and family to try be in the moment and present, especially when we are together as a family.”

Reading Specialist and past parent Lisa Rhome was also impressed by Dr. Baime’s presentation. In fact, she hopes to take a course with Dr. Baime in the future. “Dr. Baime's presentation was particularly appealing to me because his mindfulness strategies increase attention and focus and decrease anxiety. I shared the information I learned from his presentation with my sons (both Benchmark alumni) and, hopefully, we can all one day have the opportunity to take one of his seminars.”

At the end of the evening, Dr. Baime had made a clear and compelling case for the profound and far-reaching benefits of mindfulness practice. He made his point theoretically, empirically, and experientially – mindfulness provides benefits for life.

*Robb Gaskins, Ph.D. is the Head of School of the Benchmark School.*
A Postsecondary Model for Cultivating Successful College Habits in Students with Learning Differences
By Andrew DiPrinzio

For many college students, after move in day, when parents close their trunks and drive home, there is both a sense of freedom, but also unease. For a student with a learning difference, this unease is heightened as they wonder if they have what it takes. They ask themselves: Can I handle college-level courses? Will I be able to read, write, and study like a scholar? Will professors understand my disability? Who will I go to for support?

College admissions promise robust, active disability centers, yet students feel lost on a campus with no familiar teacher or advocate. College disability coordinators will not make the first move to bring a student into his or her office and seek to understand their unique learning style. There is a wealth of accommodations available to students, yet many do not know what assistive technology is available, what accommodations the law entitles them to, and which services would be most helpful. It’s no secret that students with LDs have a much lower graduate rate as compared with “typical students,” yet a recent study from the Stanford Graduate School of Education showed that college coaching significantly increases the likelihood that a student will stay in school, citing a 10-to-15 percent increase in graduation rates.  

The AIM Advantage is a college coaching program developed by AIM Academy to address the unease our college-bound alumni faced. AIM Academy is a first through twelfth grade school in the Philadelphia area for students with language-based learning disabilities. We launched our program in 2012 with a mission to support college success through online, 1-1 coaching where students receive the support necessary to walk onto their campus with confidence.

The AIM Advantage begins the summer before freshman fall semester because once classes begin, it is full-steam ahead. Professors assign quizzes during the second week and major essays/tests by the third. If smartly applied accommodations are not in place, the workload can overwhelm students. Our coaches bring the student to the center of their education to create a summer to-do list including: file psycho-ed evaluation and IEP with disability office, meet with coordinator to choose accommodations, download all class syllabuses, and set-up useful technology.

Once classes begin, student and coach meet weekly on Google Hangouts to begin habit building. The AIM Advantage has pinpointed three habits critical to college success: organization, active engagement, and course-specific study skills. Our program is not about doing well on one paper, but coaching students on how to become confident, successful learners. We measure our success like colleges do — using what’s called quality points. QPs are determined by combining a student’s GPA and earned credit hours. On average, AIM Advantage students show significant growth in QPs they earn each semester. As freshmen in our program, who are beginning to build successful habits with their coach, they earn an average of 35 QPs. Yet by their junior year, having cultivated those habits, they are up to 48 QPs, which means their grades are higher and they are taking more courses.

Unlike high school, most key college deadlines are available to students on day one. AIM Advantage students begin by creating a full-semester calendar. The first class of each course is generally syllabus review. This can be daunting as students are hit with dozens of tests, research essays, mid-terms, and finals. The calendar allows students to visualize the amount of free-time they’ll need to smartly utilize. How should they fill that time? Colleges offer free peer-tutoring and a math/writing center. Students should schedule peer-tutoring sessions (I recommend an hour a week, per class). If an essay is due on a Friday, they should schedule a writing center meeting for the Tuesday before. If a test is on their full-semester calendar, they should plan to visit their professor’s office hours the week before to discuss study strategies. Colleges are also beginning to staff reading specialists who will meet with students to help chunk dense textbook reading.

Students actively engage with their “college team.” This team includes professors, disability coordinators, and tutors, but often students with LDs are reluctant to communicate. Our coaches work with students to prepare for meetings with

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Recipient of the 2016 Hoopes Award:
The Children’s Dyslexia Centers of Pennsylvania

The prestigious Janet L. Hoopes Award was established in 1993 in memory of Dr. Janet L. Hoopes, a founding PBIDA Board member and Professor Emeritus at Bryn Mawr College. It is presented to an individual, or individuals, in Pennsylvania or Delaware who have made a significant contribution to the education of those living with learning disabilities.

It is with great pleasure that The Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association presents the 2015 Janet L. Hoopes Award to The Children’s Dyslexia Centers of Pennsylvania.


In 1994, J. Phillip Berquist inspired the Scottish Rite Masons to collaborate with Massachusetts General Hospital to launch this philanthropy. Their mission is to help with the life-long challenges of dyslexia. Until the Masonic Learning Centers (since renamed the Children’s Dyslexia Centers, Inc.) were launched in this organization’s Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, no other national charity had adopted this critical need as a major concern. Although studies revealed the existence of effective, research-based programs for treating dyslexia, no one was addressing the availability and cost to families and society in a systematic way.

The Masons made the following philanthropic pledges in 1994:

- To help children with dyslexia learn to read and to reach their full potential;
- To help their families end the frustration, guilt and disruption caused by dyslexia;
- To help communities by developing Children’s Dyslexia Centers to foster youngsters success in and out of school.

These Centers provide one on one tutoring at no charge to school-aged children who have been diagnosed with dyslexia. Children are eligible regardless of economic status or Masonic affiliation. The positive impact of this early intervention on the lives of these children is compelling.

The Orton-Gillingham (OG) approach, developed early in the 20th century, is the remediation used at the Centers. OG implements a sequential, multisensory phonetic approach and a variety of sensory data to help children understand the written word. Children’s Dyslexia Centers, Inc. has received accreditation from The International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council (IMSLEC), a national organization that accredits training programs that meet its high standards for preparing specialists in Multisensory Structured Language Education, now renamed Structured Literacy.

As part of their objective to achieve effective tutor training, the Children's Dyslexia Centers maintain active affiliations with institutions of higher education. Affiliated schools offer course credits to those training at the Centers. Free Orton-Gillingham training at our Centers leads to Initial Level Certification. Graduate credit is often available. In addition, professionals have opportunities for advanced levels of training while earning continuing education credits.

Children are tutored by the trained tutors one-on-one, twice weekly after regular school hours. This allows for the curriculum to be tailored to each individual child as necessary. Progress is monitored annually and is made in small quantifiable steps. Services provided by the Children’s Dyslexia Centers equip children with the skills and the confidence they need to approach learning with eagerness and without fear.

Twenty-one years later, the Scottish Rite Masons have taken a national lead in combating untreated dyslexia in children. There are now forty-nine Children’s Dyslexia Centers in thirteen states. Today PBIDA honors the nine remarkable Centers in Pennsylvania, their corporate leadership in Massachusetts, the current local Directors and those that came before them.

Directors, Children’s Dyslexia Centers
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Mary Ellen Trent, Director of Admissions | maryellen.trent@dvfs.org 610.640.4150 19 E. Central Ave., Paoli, PA
A few weeks ago I attended the Schools of the Future Conference in Honolulu, HI. A tough assignment to be certain, but I felt inspired to take part and forced myself to attend. It was an excellent conference in terms of the speakers, the breakout sessions and the overall “vibe” of the people and facility over those few days.

During the closing keynote on the first day, we heard from Michele R. Weslander Quaid, PhD. Her presentation was very good and her story itself was heartfelt, inspiring and worthy of your time to research and explore further. She spoke of helping students to become better people and developing the skills necessary to become agents of change. She discussed the opportunity we all have to reinvent schools to create an open environment that encourages communication and provides students with the opportunity to chase their passion with a bias for action, not waiting to get someone else to tell them what to do. Excellent messages that echo my own philosophy as I help our schools to redefine themselves and their classroom environments to meet the needs of all students, but especially those with learning differences.

It was her time as the Chief Technology Officer and innovation evangelist for Google however that sparked my interest the most. Due to the nature of my work, I am continually immersed in everything imaginable regarding academic technology products and processes and the rapidly advancing pace of technology that has become available for daily, hourly, per minute personal use. A pace that seems to have blasted through the original theories encapsulated within Moore’s Law nearly 45 years ago. As she began to describe the projects she worked on and what Google is currently engaged in, I was amazed at how much I did not know about this company and the effect it has on so many people even when they are totally unaware of it. I will provide details, links to information about some of these projects shortly.

Dr. Weslander began her discussion of her time at Google by reflecting upon the opening sentence of the company’s 2004 IPO letter, penned by co-founder Larry Page. It begins, “Google is not a conventional company. We do not intend to become one,” an amazing prediction considering where the company has come since that day 11 years ago and what it has achieved. The entire letter is well written and a window into where Google’s founders intended to take the company, as well as their amazing insight into where technology was going and how they were going to help shape the lives of millions of people on a daily basis.

It was during this time at Google that Dr. Weslander developed what she considers to be some of the key traits she uses every day in her career. Traits that seem to reflect back on her opening statements about education reform. Here are a few of her insights that seem to be common sense, but are rarely part of our classroom instruction. She spoke of setting your “default” to share ideas. A concept that many workers might see as counterintuitive. For many of us, we were taught that if you come up with an idea, build upon it to make it your own and then share it when you feel that you are finished and ready to bring it up to a teacher or supervisor, or coworkers for their review and feedback. Hopefully before someone else does. This competitive strategy was often seen as the best way to get that key promotion, that big bonus, corner office, etc.

Life at Google taught her to engage with her colleagues from the very inception of ideas to allow everyone to provide feedback to help make the idea grow. She was trained to trust and empower the teams and individuals that she supervised and remain transparent in her communication with everyone. She also had a motto that she followed: “Be decisive, no more paralysis through analysis”. A great motto for all educators and administrators to follow.

Her final comments regarding the key traits that she learned during her time at Google were amazingly parallel to the traits that I emphasize with the administrators I work with at schools that are considering new technology initiatives, or those trying to get technology truly integrated into the curriculum.

Dr. Weslander saw the following additional traits equally important to her career development, and she listed them all and reviewed them with us during her session.

• Be open-minded to with no age or rank bias
• Find and protect your innovators
• Protect your rogues
• Get top level buy-in
• Engage middle management
• Leverage early adopters
• Have trusted agents outside the organization
• Trust your gut instincts

1Moore’s Law is a computing term, which originated around 1970 through the observations of Gordon E. Moore, the co-founder of Intel; the simplified version of this law states that processor speeds, or overall processing power for computers will double every two years.
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While Dr. Weslander based this list on her experience in the workplace of a large corporation like Google, it has a direct correlation to what I see as critical in every school I visit. Step through each of these with me as I compare them to the school environment.

We cannot define the technical ability, or tenacity of our teachers by their age, or if they are within the “Digital Natives” age range, a term that is completely inaccurate and unreliable. We need to find, encourage and protect the teachers AND the students who are our innovators and sometimes our rogues. They are the ones who take chances that others will not take and are not afraid to fail. Without failure, innovation cannot be present. They are also the true agents for change!

The idea of top-level buy-in and stating expectations by the top administrative leadership in our schools is critical with regard to technology integration in the classroom. This includes middle management (think Admin Team and Department Heads). Early adopters are the teachers who run right behind the innovators and pick up on everything they do and work hard to make it work in their classroom every day. They often form the largest, most influential group of teachers and can help bring others along.

Trusted agents in an academic environment are the vendors and developers of products and services that meet the needs of your curriculum. Nothing is more frustrating for a teacher and his/her students than having curriculum and materials that simply don't work, or don't fit well into the environment. That is where these relationships become important, especially with the substantial costs associated with making a bad decision! Finally, teachers need to trust their instincts and decide for themselves which path to take to meet the requirements set forth by the administration regarding technology. In the end, they must remember that it is not about their level of comfort, but meeting the needs of today’s students and the environment they will be a part of upon graduation.

To complete her presentation, Dr. Weslander shared a number of projects that the team at Google have undertaken. Many of them are focused in some way on education. Some of these projects began during her time at Google, while others are more recent. Many of them are ongoing initiatives that you may have read about, or may have seen on the news. Others are more obscure and almost read like a work of fiction.

I find it fascinating to see this kind of work in action. More importantly, I believe it is important to let our children and our students know that these jobs truly exist. The mind of a student with a learning difference often guides them toward a path that may seem outside the norm for others, even their parents—a career that others would not dare to attempt, or even consider. We have artists and chefs, sculptors and photographers, firefighters, game developers and so many more. It can often be a frustrating and sometimes very lengthy process for our students to find the right fit. But in the end, they are often the most satisfied with what they do.

I am thankful that these dreamers of ours exist and a company like Google and many others are available for some of them to find their place. I urge you to check out the following web sites for yourself to learn more about the work that Google does behind the scenes, far beyond helping all of us simply “Google it” every day.

**Google Related Links:**

- http://www.google.com/earth/
- http://www.google.com/loon/
- https://www.google.com/selfdrivingcar/
- https://www.madewithcode.com
- https://www.google.com/edu/
- https://edutrainingcenter.withgoogle.com
- https://www.google.com/doodle4google/
- http://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2015/02/27/16-creepy-google-projects

**Other Reference Links:**

- "Crazy Ones" Apple Think Different Commercial (Dr. Weslander’s all time favorite ad)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM8GiNGeXuM

Bob Sager, M.Ed., is the President and Founder of Edu-Tech Academic Solutions, the leading provider of technology support, management and classroom integration solutions specifically designed for independent schools throughout the Philadelphia region.
Laughlin Children’s Center Provides Free Reading Screenings to the Community

Sewickley, PA—The Laughlin Children’s Center will offer free early reading screenings to the community every third Wednesday of the month from January to June. The thirty-minute screenings can be scheduled for any child in kindergarten through second grade and will take place at the Center at 424 Frederick Avenue.

About ten million children have significant difficulties learning to read, according to Learning Disabilities Online. The Predictive Assessment of Reading (PAR) screening will enable parents to know in advance if their child falls into this category and to take the necessary steps to develop targeted reading skills. “We are really excited about this new assessment and its ability to predict areas of potential strength or struggle. It is an excellent tool in determining if early reading intervention is needed,” Amy Jackson, Academic Assistant Director, says.

Parents can expect the PAR to evaluate their child’s reading specific skills such as knowledge of the alphabet and basic phonics, vocabulary identification, and language fluency, all in less than 15 minutes. After the test, a trained Laughlin instructor will sit down with parents to interpret the results of the assessment and to discuss the student’s options for improvement. Jackson says that what she loves about the test “is that each results print-out comes with simple suggestions for the parent to facilitate learning progress.”

Screenings will be held from 9:15 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on the following dates: Jan. 20, Feb. 17, March 16, April 20, May 18, and June 15. Parents can call the Center at (412) 741-4087 to reserve a slot. Further information can be found at LCC’s website: www.laughlincenter.org. Contact Arianna Holder, a.holder@laughlincenter.org, 412.741.4087.

Pittsburgh Children's Dyslexia Center

Discover the Best IPad Apps for Literacy Instruction
Saturday, May 7, 2016

Elaine Cheesman, Ph. D. is an Associate Professor of Special Education at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and a Qualified Instructor (QI) of Academic Language Therapists. Her primary research, teaching, and service interests are teacher-preparation in scientifically based reading instruction and the use of technology in literacy education. Dr. Cheesman received the Excellence in Teacher Educator Award from the Teacher Education Division of the Colorado Council for Exceptional Children, the Teacher of the Year and the Outstanding Researcher awards from the College of Education at the University of Colorado. The reading courses she developed are among the first to be officially recognized by the International Dyslexia Association for adhering to the Knowledge and Practice Standards for Teachers of Reading (IDA, 2010). Location: 3579 Masonic Way, Pittsburgh, PA 15237-2700. Contact Janet Becker, Director, 412-931-3181.

Tutor Training

The Children’s Dyslexia Center’s training program is accredited at the Teacher level and Instructor of Teacher level by the International Multisensory Structured Language Education Council (IMSLEC) and the International Dyslexia Association (IDA). All certified graduates of the Children’s Dyslexia Center’s training program are graduates of an IMSLEC-accredited training program. The next training at the Pittsburgh Children’s Dyslexia Center will run May thru June, 2016, with two classes per week. Contact: Janet Becker, Director, Telephone: 412-931-3181.
pointed questions, and also to craft appropriate emails to professors. Though it seems small, this is an essential advocacy skill. Through this type of engagement, students ask critical questions such as: As I read each chapter, what should I look for to best prepare for the test? Can we meet to go over my essay outline? Can you point me towards the right database for research?

The final habit, course-specific study skills, is difficult to cultivate. Philosophy? Bioethics? Asian Cultures? Statistics? No one reading, writing, or study skill could cover the broad span of courses a student will take. While overviews such as study skills workshops can provide helpful tips, our coaches get into the nitty-gritty content of each course to find the best possible study methods. Coaches download the professor’s materials, read along textbooks sections, and look over lecture notes to find the most effective study strategies for each specific class.

Of course even the best prepared students will hit bumps along the road. Perhaps this is when the value of our coaches is best seen. Students should strive for success, but prepare for failure. On their full-semester calendars, students highlight their school’s withdraw date (the last day to withdraw from a class without affecting GPA). Students will fail tests and will miss deadlines — it happens. The worst reaction is to disengage and feel defeated. With their coaches, our students preserve, problem-solve, and build back confidence to take on the next assignment.

We tell students to see their education as an investment, and it certainly is. A recent survey by the College Board showed the net price to attend a private college on a moderate budget is $46,272 per year. A student with learning disabilities must take advantage of every service their tuition entitles them to receive. The AIM Advantage is cost effective, as it ensures students get the most from their college and boosts the likelihood of graduation.

Andrew DiPrinzio is the director of the AIM Advantage Program at AIM Academy in Conshohocken, PA. He has worked at AIM for five years and this year received his MFA from Fairfield University. AIM Academy, launched in 2006, is a college-preparatory school for bright students who learn differently. In tandem with this program, AIM also has a dual enrollment program with local college partner Cabrini College, where students begin the process of independence, self-advocacy and confidence in achieving success in college while seniors at AIM Academy. The coaching model is used in both programs with great success.

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Calendar of Events

**MARCH**

**Benchmark Open House**, March 3, 9:00-11:00am, Benchmark School. Register at Admissions@BenchmarkSchool.org

**Woodlynde School Open House**, March 8, 8:45am, Woodlynde School. Register at www.woodlynde.org/openhouse

**Wilson Introductory Workshop**, March 9,10,11, 9:00am-3:00pm, AIM Academy. Register at kkeesey@aimpa.org.

**AIM Academy Parent Open House**, March 16, 9:00-11:00am, AIM Academy. Register at abedrosian@aimpa.org.

**APRIL**

**Kristie Jones Newton, Ph.D.**, Associate Professor of Mathematics Education, Teaching & Learning, Temple University, April 5, 7pm, Benchmark School Center for Empowered Learning. Dr. Newton will present a talk on the links between motivation, learning, and instruction in mathematics and the characteristics of high-quality mathematics instruction. Free and Open to the Public. Register at BenchmarkSchool.org.

**Benchmark Open House**, April 7, 9:00-11:00am, Benchmark School. Register at Admissions@BenchmarkSchool.org

**Unlocking Learning Through Technology** presented by Bill Keeney, Ph.D., April 8, 12:00-2:00pm, Delaware Valley Friends School. RSVP required, space limited. Contact Lisa Howell, lisa.howell@dvfs.org.

**Woodlynde School Open House**, April 12, 8:45 am, Woodlynde School. Register at www.woodlynde.org/openhouse

**AIM Academy Parent Open House**, April 13, 9:00-11:00am, AIM Academy. Register at abedrosian@aimpa.org.

**The Impact of Stress on Learning and Behavior in Kids with LD/ADHD: What to Know and What to Do!**, presented by Dr. Jerome Schultz, April 18, 9:00am-3:00pm, AIM Academy. Register at kkeesey@aimpa.org.

**Wilson Just Words Introduction Workshop**, April 20, 21, 9:00am-3:00pm, AIM Academy. Register at kkeesey@aimpa.org.

**Wilson Fundations Level 1 Workshop**, April 28, 9:00-3:00pm, AIM Academy. Register at kkeesey@aimpa.org.

**Lost in the Tech Effect: Strategies for Successful Work-Family-Life Integration**, presented by Dr. Catherine Steiner-Adair, April 28, 7:00 pm, The Literacy Institute at Woodlynde School. Register at www.woodlynde.org/literacyinstitute.

**MAY**

**Benchmark Open House**, May 12, 9:00-11:00am, Benchmark School. Register at Admissions@BenchmarkSchool.org

**AIM Academy Parent Open House**, May 4, 9:00-11am, AIM Academy. Register at abedrosian@aimpa.org.

**Woodlynde School Open House**, May 10 at 8:45am, Woodlynde School. Register at www.woodlynde.org/openhouse
The Powerful Impact of Experience Dyslexia®, A Simulation

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This year we had a large outreach to the community at the Pilot School in Delaware; in-service programs for St. Mary School, Plumstead Christian School, and Swarthmore Rutledge School in PA; an education course at Haverford College; and a class at the Haverford Township Adult School.

Lives are being changed. A parent said the experience “empowered me to more constructively address the issues and resulting frustrations.” Another parent commented “I expected the process to be more of an intellectual exercise. While it certainly was, I was beyond moved, impressed and inspired by the powerful emotions which were elicited. It is the emotions stirred in me which will endure for the rest of my life.” A college student reflected that “individuals with learning differences may be put into categories that show off their inabilities, instead of their capabilities.” A teacher noted that the simulation “helped to point out what is not helpful, though it seems like it should be. This was a real think-outside-the-box experience.” A Spanish teacher said “The program reminded me that rather than focusing on my curriculum and everything that I need to cover, I need to remain focused on the learners and the speed at which they can comfortably progress.” These are only a fraction of the many comments about insights gained and approaches changed.

To schedule the dyslexia simulation for your organization, contact Betsy Boston at betsy@pbida.org or 610-527-1548
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Keynote Address by Hugh Catts, Ph.D.

Reading Comprehension Is More Than a Test Score: Implications for Assessment and Intervention

Dr. Catts is Professor and Director of the School of Communication Science and Disorders at Florida State University. He spent much of his career as a professor and researcher at the University of Kansas. He has taught courses in language science and literacy development and disabilities. His research interests include the early identification and prevention of reading disabilities. He is a past board member of the International Dyslexia Association and past board member and president of the Society for the Scientific Study of Reading. He has received the Samuel T. Orton Award from the International Dyslexia Association and the Honors of the Association, from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association for his career contributions in each of these disciplines.

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