

To: Members of Lab LD Parent Group and other interested parties

From: Paula Worthington

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This group has met twice, on May 2 and May 16, and since then many informal conversations, meetings, and emails have taken place. These notes, based on what I've heard and read to date (thanks to all who have contributed so far!), summarize developments to date and discuss possible issues to pursue going forward. (Some of this material was shared in May in a previous version of these notes.) *Please email me with any comments or suggestions!*

Summary

Lab parent Phoebe Naoum organized two meetings this spring. About 20 Lab families were represented across the two meetings, at which we shared concerns, hopes, and ideas. At the May 16 meeting, Julie Marie Lemon (JML) and Paula Worthington (PW) agreed to chair the group going forward, and the group will be some sort of "sub group" or subcommittee of the Lab Parents Association. My general impression is that while Lab families respect and appreciate the school's wealth of resources available to serve students with learning challenges, families have some new ideas on how to best take advantage of all the energy and expertise currently distributed among students, teachers, parents, tutors, and therapists.

Where we are going

Our group needs to establish its priorities and form working groups by project or interest area. Some ideas are definitely "long-term" in nature, while others are quite feasible in a fairly short period of time. The table below (a revised version of the one I distributed in May) is intended to stimulate discussion and further development—it is not an "action plan" with a detailed time line, and its list of possible projects is just that—possibilities, to which we can add or subtract as the group decides.

What's next

1. *Consider our top priorities:* We meet next on Thursday, June 23. What should our group's top priorities be? What projects should we pursue, and over what time period? We may want to devote some effort to some short-term projects with decent visibility and high value (e.g., establishing a web-based discussion board for parents) as well as to longer-term projects (e.g., acquiring books and other LD-related materials and finding a physical "home" for them somewhere at the Lab school).
2. *Dig into your personal "top issue":* Bring your ideas and willingness to get into the details. We will form working groups at the June meeting. By the end of this meeting, we should have a list of projects people are working on and a desired "time line" of getting the projects going.

Sketch of how the Lab LD Parent Group can organize its efforts:

	Desired status	Strategy	Possible projects
Accountability and consistency	<p>(1) Shared understanding of how serving LD students fits into Lab school vision</p> <p>(2) Coordination of effort, sharing of information, and well-defined accountability, going across classrooms, grade levels, and schools</p>	<p>LD Parent group participates in on-going conversation about LD at Lab and advocates for clear and well-understood expectations for students, parents, and teachers</p>	<p>(1) Research underlying legal obligations of U of C and U of C Lab Schools</p> <p>(2) Research how other schools serve LD students</p> <p>(3) Clarify and publicize school's policies and accountability procedures (e.g., develop an "FAQ" for parents regarding staffings; encourage easy access to brochures, other materials describing Lab school policies and procedures)</p> <p>(4) Act to reconcile any inconsistencies (between law and policy; between policy and practice)</p>
Communication-Family and Staff	<p>(1) All relevant parties have a shared understanding of commitments made at staffings and/or in other settings.</p> <p>(2) Effectiveness of interventions or accommodations is evaluated on a routine basis; results are shared with all relevant parties, with follow-up as needed.</p>	<p>LD Parent Group encourages development of more formalized processes and communications.</p>	<p>(1) Work with Lab staff to develop templates for written summary of educational plan and/or periodic evaluations</p>
Communication-Family to Family	<p>Parents have multiple ways of sharing their experiences regarding teaching strategies; therapies; physical accommodations; etc.</p>	<p>LD Parent Group encourages and facilitates these conversations</p>	<p>(1) Initiate web-based bulletin board and/or other media for families to use to share information and experiences</p> <p>(2) Use room parents to let families know of LD Parent Group resources</p>

Resources (1)	Faculty and parents are familiar with resources and have access to resources aimed at LD students (e.g., reading programs; lined paper; slant boards; software etc.)	LD Parent Group creates “virtual resource center” and makes it available to all students, families, and staff	<p>(1) Revitalize/restock Blaine Library’s existing “resource shelf” (current holdings: set of Mel Levine videotapes)</p> <p>(2) Capitalize on existing informal/personal libraries of Carla Young and Beverly Biggs</p> <p>(3) Create and maintain resource lists of books; software programs; tutors; therapists; etc.</p> <p>(4) Create and maintain some “FAQ” for parents of LD students (e.g., “who’s who in learning services?” “what happens if my child is struggling in reading?” etc.)</p>
Resources (2)	Faculty take advantage of workshops and learning staff “consultations” (see below) on “best practices” in reaching students who learn differently	?	?
Resources (3)	<p>(1) Learning services staff offer interventions tailored to student needs</p> <p>(2) Learning services staff offer “consultations” to classroom teachers based on student needs</p>	?	?

Culture	<p>(1) LD students valued for strengths</p> <p>(2) Different learning styles viewed as contributing to diversity</p> <p>(3) Accommodations, alternative assessments, and/or innovative teaching methods viewed as useful tools to encourage LD student success at the highest levels, not as steps toward weakening standards</p>	<p>LD Parent Group acts to raise visibility of LD issues, services, and resources</p>	<p>(1) Evening program on LD issues (aimed at parents)</p> <p>(2) LD Parent group has regular presence at PA meetings</p> <p>(3) Classroom-based “LD Day” or similar (aimed at students); a “read-in”; visits by successful LD adults or older students</p>
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Selected details and additional comments

Accountability and Consistency

What is Lab’s stance on serving students with LD?: This is a big issue with many dimensions. Our group may not be of one mind on it (after all, all minds do not think alike!), nor is our group the only constituency at Lab. Regardless of where Lab “draws the line,” or whether Lab establishes a clear cut line at all, our group can help by keeping this issue on the table when school leadership plans the future of the school.

Clarify and publicize existing school policies re: LD: Wherever Lab school “draws its line” regarding its LD students, our group could fill in the gaps for parents by developing detailed documents spelling out exactly how parents can navigate at Lab and by insuring those materials are widely distributed. For example, how should parents prepare for a “staffing,” and what should parents expect from a staffing? How can parents learn about the Lab school’s policies? Perhaps one of the fall mailings to new and returning families should include some material related to LD issues.

Consider differences across schools at Lab: By some reports, parents view the middle school as the most effective at serving LD students at Lab. How does the middle school organize its resources and delivery of services to its LD students, and how does that compare with the lower school and the high school? How do the priorities and concerns differ across the schools? (For example, it is probably true that diagnostic issues are very important in the lower school and much less important in the high school.)

Communication: family to family:

Develop and maintain some easy-to-use “sharing” venues: Families of LD students would highly value having some easy ways to connect with similar families and hear their stories. It seems that the issues of interest change as students move through the school, so we definitely should aim for offering lower school, middle-school, and high-school specific information and experiences. This could take one or more of several forms: (1) a “hard copy” booklet of submitted entries; (2) a web-based on-going bulletin board/discussion board; (3) periodic items submitted/published in the PA Newsletter; and/or other.

Resources (1): physical and on-line materials

Acquire and maintain a stock of books and other material for parents, teachers, and students to consult: Some of this is already “lying around” in different places in Lab; getting an “inventory” and organizing (perhaps centralizing) some of the materials might be possible. For example, we might consider: (1) building on the existing “shelf” in Blaine Library (currently has set of Mel Levine videotapes); and/or (2) working with Carla Young and/or Beverly Biggs who, by report, have personal libraries of this sort.

Create and maintain resource lists: We can develop lists of helpful books; tapes; reading programs; assistive technology; tutors; therapists; etc. [this could be kept on-line in some fashion]. To keep the lists neutral and professional in tone, we could identify parents willing to be contacted as “references” for particular books, pedagogical approaches, tutors, etc.] (For example, on the issue of graphomotor skills and handwriting, I would be willing to act as a “reference” for the *Handwriting Without Tears* program and its specially-lined paper, based on my son’s experience. Similarly, I would be willing to act as a contact regarding my son’s occupational therapist.)

Create and maintain some “FAQ” for parents of LD students: For example, we could put together a list of Lab’s learning services staff and a brief description of their responsibilities and fields of expertise.

Culture

Evening program: The Lab LD Parents Group could sponsor a school-wide evening event on a topic of interest, such as teaching students with dyslexia; general presentation on learning styles; how to know if your child is having difficulty with (fill in the blanks....reading, math, ?); etc. The event would be substantive but would also serve purpose of introducing Lab LD Parent Group to larger school community.

Engagement with PA: Julie Marie Lemon has agreed to attend the monthly PA meetings; this is a great opportunity for our group to keep informed about school-wide news and to keep others abreast of our plans.

Classroom-based “LD awareness” day/week: coordinated set of activities, presentations, lectures, etc. to “bring issues of community and superb (i.e., inclusive, Dewey- and Levine-based) teaching and learning right into the classrooms, hallways and lunchroom where everyone would be most likely to encounter it.” Could include guest lectures on learning differences during the Tuesday and Friday development periods for the teachers; in-class presentations about learning differences by students and tutors; presentation of plays or essays written by student LD support group; staffing an “information table” in the cafeteria and/or lobby with information on LD resources; coordinated displays and storytelling in Libraries about learning; guest author events; etc. [Perhaps a useful comparison is how well, or how poorly, events like African-American History month are experienced at Lab?]