



## First Annual Special Olympics Young Athletes Program

Valley Ridge Academy will be hosting its first annual Special Olympics Young Athletes Program on April 5, 2016. The Young Athletes Program was established by Special Olympics International to provide early developmental opportunities for pre-school children, utilizing guided motor activities. Students from Valley Ridge Academy under the age of 8, which includes two pre-kindergarten classes and one elementary class, will be participating.

The students have been practicing for the event throughout the school year, and will be completing a variety of skills and tasks, including hurdling, striking, kicking, throwing, and various other gross motor activities. In addition to the physical skills, the students have also learned many positive social skills from the program, such as teamwork, cooperation, and good sportsmanship. Upon completion, participants will earn a certificate and ribbon marking their achievement.

“We are looking forward to a fun and exciting afternoon,” said Anne Crane, an ESE Paraprofessional at Valley Ridge Academy. “The Students have been working hard, and it has been a pleasure to watch them grow throughout the school year.”

In addition to the participants, many other Valley Ridge Academy students will be supporting the event. Students from the VPK Pre-Kindergarten class will be serving as athlete buddies. Middle School “Hawk Buddies” have been teaching the students the skills throughout the year, and will be on hand during the event. Finally, the students’ siblings and families will be in attendance, cheering on the athletes.

*Contributed By: Marcus Sowcik, ESE Teacher, Valley Ridge Academy*





Ms. Bonvallet's and Mrs. Bowker's class proudly present their banner for Spread the Word to End the Word, a Special Olympics and Best Buddies sponsored movement which takes place each March to stop the use of the R-word in reference to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



Posing before the Best Buddies Friendship Ball on March 11th.



Students prepare for their opening number for Pedro Menendez's talent show. They danced to "Happy" by Pharrell Williams.

*Contributed by: Ms. Debbra Bonvallet, ESE Teacher, Pedro Menendez High School*

## Life Work Transition Program

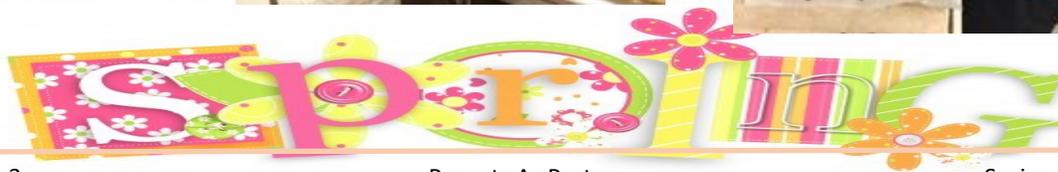
The Life Work Transition Program is a site-based transition program for students with disabilities in St. Johns County that began in August 2015. Teacher, Adam Ringwood, and Employment Specialist, Ami Brennan, lead the program for students with disabilities who have graduated from high school. The students participate in daily Community Based Work Experiences (CBWE) five times per week; previous and current locations include Flagler Hospital, The Council on Aging, The Conch House Restaurant and Resort, Bealls Outlet, and Publix.

The community has openly embraced our Life Work students. Four of our students have competitive paid employment at local businesses which include Murray Bros Caddy Shack, Publix on Vilano Beach, the Council on Aging, and Red Lobster. Students have also been event coordinators at several large events that have recently taken place in the community, including The Seafood Festival, Celtic Festival, Seniors and Boomers Expo Featuring the Antique Road Show, and are slated to help with the Rhythm and Ribs Festival in April.

In addition to learning hands-on vocational skills, students experience daily living, social/emotional, and academic skills instruction within the real world setting. Students work on developing a visual resume to bring with them on job interviews. Visual resumes help students express who they are, the skills they are strongest in, and self-advocate in areas they may need assistance in. The resumes open the eyes of employers and help them see beyond our students' disabilities.

The school district and local community are so very proud of our Life Work students and look forward to seeing the program grow in the future. For more information on Life Work, including admission criteria, please contact Adam Ringwood, [adam.ringwood@stjohns.k12.fl.us](mailto:adam.ringwood@stjohns.k12.fl.us).

*Contributed by: Leigh Ann Hale,  
ESE Program Specialist*



## First Tee Golf at The Webster School

During the month of April The Webster School MKY grades 3-5 will be going to First Tee to practice golf for Special Olympics. We are fortunate to be able to go every Friday this month. During practice, our students learn the basics of golf (putting, chipping, driving swinging, and how to hold the golf club properly/ stance). We are so lucky to have the support of Ms. Jo Stansel who has provided these field trips at no cost to our students. We are also fortunate to have the wonderful supportive staff at First Tee. They have welcomed our students with open arms and have done everything possible to make this a fun and educational experience. These field trips provide much more than basic golf skills. They provide a way for our students to practice their social skills with other students and adults.



*Contributed By: Elizabeth DiBella, ESE Teacher, The Webster School*



# 10 Ways to Be an Effective Advocate for Your Child

As a parent, you are your child's best education advocate – until he or she is old enough and informed enough to speak up for himself or herself. You know your child's strengths and challenges, and you can help identify and push for the resources your child needs to succeed. Here are some tips to help you advocate for your child at school.

## Keep a paper trail.

Make sure to keep copies of all report cards, progress reports, evaluations, educational assessments, IEPs, medical records, homework samples and other documents. They can provide insights into your child's learning issues and how much progress he's making. Take notes at important meetings and keep copies in a file.

## Study up.

Read and attend workshops. Get insights from parents whose children have learning and attention issues. This way you'll be familiar with your child's challenges and possible ways that schools can help.

## Build relationships.

Get to know your child's teachers as well as the school psychologist, speech-language pathologist and anyone else who can help you help your child. Building relationships with these people will help keep the lines of communication more open. There's less of a chance of misunderstanding if everyone knows each other.

## Ask questions.

It's important to work with the school, but make sure you're in agreement before you give your approval. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification, request further testing or challenge the school's decision regarding services. It's a good idea to submit in writing any requests for additional testing. Keep copies of these requests that include the date you sent them. It might also be helpful to keep a log of whom you spoke to and when.

## Stay calm.

Remember that the teachers and other school staff members involved are there to help, even if you disagree with them. The process will go more smoothly if you listen and keep an open mind. Make a list of the topics you want to cover in important meetings. Take deep breaths. Consider bringing a friend or relative who can take notes for you and help keep you steady.



# 10 Ways, cont...

## **Remember that you're in control.**

Parents should never feel pressured by school staff to make a decision. Ultimately, you're in the driver's seat. So while it's important to be receptive to the school staff's thoughts, don't agree to something you think goes against what's best for your child.

## **Know the law.**

Learn about your child's rights to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Your child might have the right to extra time on tests and other accommodations for modifications. Keep informed about your school's legal obligations to provide your child an evaluation and other services. You can also request that the school provide a parent advocate to help you during important meetings.

## **Talk to your child.**

Understanding what your child is experiencing in school is essential to advocating for his or her needs. For example, the 30 minutes s/he's supposed to spend each week with a speech-language pathologist might only be 20 minutes because the therapist keeps showing up late. Asking your child detailed questions will also help him or her understand what it is she or he needs. This will help him or her advocate for himself or herself when s/he's older.

## **Know the lingo.**

Find out whether the speech-language pathologist and other service providers are "pushing in" (working with your child in the classroom) or "pulling out" (taking your child to a separate location). This is important because your child may say s/he didn't go to speech that day, but it could be that the speech-language pathologist pushed into the classroom.

## **Attend meetings regularly.**

IEP meetings and parent-teacher conferences are obviously good opportunities to get an update on your child's progress, but there are also other times. When teachers host a publishing party so kids can showcase their work, this is a good time to see what's been going on in the classroom. PTA meetings may provide insight into the curriculum changes. The PTA can also help push for weekend test prep and other resources that could help your child.

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/partnering-with-childs-school/working-with-childs-teacher/10-ways-to-be-an-effective-advocate-for-your-child?view=slideview>



## Upcoming Events

**HEAL Zoo Walk for Autism– April 24.** Mark your calendars for the HEAL Zoo Walk for Autism at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens on Sunday, April 24. This is a family fun event that you don't want to miss! This is an affordable way to see the Zoo, meet friends, and make new ones! Registration will open soon! Stay tuned to HEAL's Facebook page for updates!

**RYC Rotary-Youth-Camp– July through August.** Free camp for students with disabilities, age 7 through adulthood. Our camp enables its participants to grow in self-confidence and to experience success in physical activities and social relationships. For more information please view our website, [www.nfryc.org](http://www.nfryc.org).

**VSA Florida Student of the Month Program– Application accepted on Rolling Basis now through May 1st.** Who can be nominated? Any student with a disability who is accomplished in visual arts, music, dance, drama, literary arts or just exemplify amazing personal achievement and leadership through one of the genres. For more information and to make a nomination visit, <http://vsaf1.org/programs/student-of-the-month>.

**CARD & FDLRS-MDC Satellite Clinics– May 16, 2016, 7:30 a.m.– 3:00 p.m.** Location: the Auditorium at the Fullerwood Training Center- 10 Hildreth Drive. Sign up for a consultative appointment with clinicians who specialize in child psychology, behavior therapy, academic interventions, Autism Screeners, Transition, and more. Appointments are at no cost to the family. Contact [Chanel.Baldwin@jax.ufl.edu](mailto:Chanel.Baldwin@jax.ufl.edu) or call (904) 633-0816.

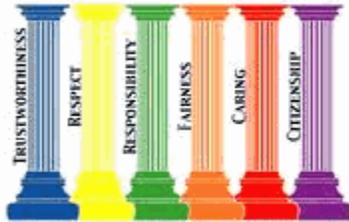
**2016 Family Café– June 10-12, 2016, Hyatt Regency Orlando, Orlando, FL.** This event provides a venue for people with disabilities and their families to learn about available services, connect with policy makers and network with each other. It features dozens of breakout sessions, a full Exhibit Hall, a series of Keynotes and multiple opportunities to interact with other families informally. There is no registration fee for individuals with disabilities and their family or caregivers. Professionals are required to pay a \$150 registration fee. For more information visit <http://www.familycafe.net/>



**Temple Grandin** is one of the world's most accomplished and well-known adults with autism. She is a professor at Colorado State University and the author of several best-selling books, which have sold more than a million copies. The HBO movie based on her life, starring Claire Danes, received seven Emmy Awards. <http://chicagohumanities.org/events/2013/animal/temple-grandin?gclid=CL26nZfD1MsCFc5ZhgodPFUATw>



# CHARACTER COUNTS!



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## Mission Statement: To identify and meet the unique educational needs of exceptional students and to provide support and resources to enhance educational opportunities so they become productive citizens.

ESE programs and services address the unique needs of students who are gifted in kindergarten through 12th grade and those with mild, moderate and severe disabilities from age three until they graduate with a regular diploma or until their 22nd birthday. ESE programs and services are designed to assist students in reaching their educational goals through the use of instructional and behavioral approaches which are research-based and exemplify best practices. Technology is used in many creative ways to meet student needs as well.

ESE services are available at all district schools for gifted students and students who have mild to moderate disabilities. Students with more significant disabilities are served in cluster programs at selected sites. Program support is provided to students, parents and school personnel by program specialists based at the district office. Students with disabilities who are not eligible for services through the ESE program may be eligible for an accommodations plan under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE THIS NEWSLETTER ELECTRONICALLY?

We hope that you find this newsletter informative and useful. The next issue of the Parents As Partners Newsletter will be posted to the St. Johns County School District web site at [www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/dept/academicservices/ese](http://www.stjohns.k12.fl.us/dept/academicservices/ese).

If you would like to receive a copy via email, please send your email address to [Sarah.Coffin@stjohns.k12.fl.us](mailto:Sarah.Coffin@stjohns.k12.fl.us) and we will gladly add you to our Parent Newsletter email list.

