

Rhode Island Tutorial & Educational Services

“Empowering students to realize their potential.”

What’s on the Inside Really Matters

Rhode Island Tutorial & Educational Services (RITES) was created to provide essential supplemental services to students with a wide range of needs, to help them succeed in school and in life. The general purpose of our newsletter is to respond to questions and concerns frequently heard from parents and educators, to describe the myriad services we provide, and to highlight the outstanding backgrounds and commitment of our professionals.

In this newsletter, we highlight the extraordinary talent our professionals bring to the table -- or desk or rug, as the case may be!

At RITES, a student is seen holistically, as a child with strengths and challenge areas, who attends school and has friends and family, who enjoys certain types of activities and has an individual learning style.

What’s on the inside really does matter -- both the inside of each child and the inside of our offices. We strive to know each of our students as a whole person, an individual who will succeed with an individualized supplemental educational program developed by top-notch professionals. In order to better accommodate our students, we will be moving our offices to a nearby location in the spring. Look for our

announcement in the mail!

In addition to introducing our newest staff members, we use this newsletter as an opportunity to describe the seminars and conferences we’ve recently attended. We are constantly familiarized with new techniques and approaches which will serve the children more and more meaningfully, and which reaffirm our organizational philosophy and program.

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter. If you have any suggestions or comments please call us at 272-4459.



Meet the Professionals...

At Rhode Island Tutorial & Educational Services, we are very proud of the professionals on staff and their commitment to helping young people excel and succeed. “We all view success as something a child feels internally,” says Lisa Bigney, Director of RITES. “We strive to provide each student with the tools he/she will need to succeed in school, and in life.” We welcome three new professionals to our team: Pam Levanos, Jane McJennett and Brenda Bennett. In addition, Dr. Myrna Silverstein’s role continues to transform to better meet the needs of parents and educators.

Pam Levanos has a Masters in Arts in teaching from Boston University. Her focus in English and in Special Education led her to teaching English in New York City for nine years to special education students, general students and English as a second language students. “It was very challenging,” says Pam, “but that experience made me feel like I could do just about anything!” She is currently completing an Orton-Gillingham practicum at the Providence-based Wolf School. “I love working to motivate middle and high school students,” says Pam. Like the other professionals at RITES, Pam seeks to make learning fun and interesting for kids. Pam says that she’s “excited to help students succeed in their classes and to raise their feelings of confidence with regard to their own abilities.”

Jane McJennett has joined the RI Tutorial and Educational Services as a teacher of reading decoding and spelling, reading comprehension, written expression, organization and study skills, French and Spanish. She works in Providence with students of all ages. She specializes in Orton-Gillingham, a structured, multisensory phonetic approach to teaching individuals with disabilities in reading, writing

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(Meet the Professionals... continued)

and spelling. In addition, Ms. McJennett has adapted this approach to the teaching of foreign languages. She is also trained in Project Read. Ms. McJennett is certified as an educational therapist for Specific Reading Disabilities (developmental dyslexia) and was the founding director of the Masonic Learning Center for Children in Rhode Island. Previously, she founded, directed and taught in the Middle School Learning Center at Providence Country Day School.

Brenda Bennett has been a special education teacher for the last ten years. She received a BA in Special Education from RI College and a Master's degree in Special Education from Cambridge College in Massachusetts. She started her teaching career at a private rehabilitation center working with students aged 7 through 21 with speech and language differences, behavioral issues and autism. She then entered the public school setting in the Bristol/Warren School District. Brenda taught a self-contained class in reading, written language and math. At this same time, Brenda became trained in the Orton-Gillingham approach and the SRA Corrective Reading and Math programs. After relocating to Cranston with her husband and child, Brenda took a position in the Cranston school system as a sixth-grade teacher, teaching math and science. Brenda joined our team of educational therapists in September.

Myrna Silverstein, Ph.D. is a psychologist

who worked for 23 years with the South Kingstown school department. She evaluated students with learning differences and was part of the team that developed appropriate educational goals for these students. Myrna holds a Masters in teaching from Yale and a Ph.D. in psychology from URI. Myrna joined our team last year as a child advocate. She is putting to use her experience and knowledge of Special Education Regulations to help families work with their school departments to receive appropriate services. Since Myrna has joined our group, she has been successful in helping many of our parents become effective advocates for their children. As part of the initial consult, Myrna reviews a child's records and pertinent regulations. She then consults with the family. Each conference is tailored to meet each family's needs. Thus far, Myrna has met with parents to help them understand procedures and regulations governing educational services and has clarified what services the public schools are and are not obligated to provide. She has prepared parents for eligibility, I.E.P. and other school meetings. She has helped parents understand and integrate the results of their child's evaluations, and shown them how to use essential findings to benefit their child. She has also met to discuss any concerns that are impacting a child's educational progress, and developed strategies with the family to improve the situation.

“It is important that parents are available to clarify directions or help with specific (homework) problems...”

Your role is to encourage, supervise and reinforce good study habits.”

(Dr. Myrna Silverstein: Homework Hints)

Game-Packs for Learning Comes to RITES

Last summer everyone on our staff attended a hands-on workshop given by Elsie Morse, an Orton-Gillingham tutor and author of “Game Packs for Learning.” She demonstrated many games that she created which support the principles of learning to read, spell and study. We bought well over twenty games from her! These games reinforce what we work on in our tutoring sessions. Our students and tutors have been enjoying these new materials that have helped make learning important skills much more fun and interesting.

The following excerpts are from Mrs. Morse's presentation materials:

“Stumble and fall into a swirling river. It's cold. It's possibly even drowning-dangerous. On the other hand, it may be refreshing. It may be full of fish to catch and bird life to discover. Prepared with a raft, you can play in a river, get to know it, enjoy it, even love it. Add a sail or two and you can glide along with ease.

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Orton-Gillingham Philosophy Reinforced at Annual Conference

“All children can learn, but not all children learn in the same way,”

Last spring, Linda and Lisa attended a full day Reading Symposium as part of the Learning Disabilities Annual Network Conference in Massachusetts. The day began with an overview of the conclusions of the Committee on the Prevention of Reading Difficulties. Outlined were the requirements for adequate reading instruction for young children and the requirements for progress in learning after this initial instruction. The components of adequate instruction - such as metalinguistic awareness, word identification and comprehension - were reviewed. There also was a discussion about the fact that there will always be a small percentage of children who will require additional assistance in learning than is provided in the classroom.

In the afternoon, four reading programs were presented. They were based on the multi-sensory structured language

principles of Orton-Gillingham. The presenters stressed the importance of multi-sensory learning because “All children can learn, but not all children learn in the same way.” This statement reinforced our belief in our own tutoring and lessons, in which the Orton-Gillingham philosophy is an integral part .

At the end of the day, we were able to look over the materials that support these programs and brought some back to share with our colleagues. We were glad to attend the conference for both our growth as educators and for the growth of our students.



Homework Hints



The following suggestions from Dr. Silverstein should help reduce homework stress for both parents and children:

- 1) **SPACE:** Try to establish a quiet work area with supplies (paper, pencils, rulers, etc.) available. Since many children find working alone in a room to be too isolating, a “family” work area is a good idea, as long as there are clear rules encouraging good work habits. A parent or other adult should be available to answer questions and refocus the children as needed. Homework time is useful for parents to catch up on their own jobs (writing letters, paying bills, etc.) and allows them to model on-task behavior.
- 2) **TIME:** Children need homework time to be set in a routine, predictable manner. Parents should have the teacher estimate how much time should be set aside for homework. If possible, the same time each day is

reserved for homework . If daily commitments vary, homework “appointments” should be set each week and written on a calendar. Homework should not be squeezed in when there’s time; it should have top priority. Some children do best completing homework in one session, while others need breaks. Once you know what works best for your child, try to schedule time-limited rests into the regular work routine.

- 3) **ORGANIZATION:** Have your child explain homework instructions to you so you can be sure he/she understands what to do. Then encourage the child to decide the order in which each assignment will be done. Children are overwhelmed when too many books and papers are in front of them. Only materials being worked on should be visible. Make sure completed work is placed in the child’s backpack to be ready for the next day.

- 4) **HOMEWORK HELP:** It is important that parents are available to clarify directions or help with specific problems. However, the purpose of homework is to practice skills that have been learned in the classroom. If you find that your child really does not understand the work, let the teacher know so the lesson can be taught again in school. Your role is to encourage, supervise and reinforce good study habits.



Happy Homeworking!

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So it is with reading. The swirling waters of English include words from many countries and many historical epochs. Each contributing language creates more unpredictable eddies and currents of spelling variations, enough to frustrate many a grown-up. Yet very young children as well as bilingual students of all ages are expected to navigate through and come out upright. Beginning and struggling readers may study these swirling currents and decide to stay on shore. To reading they say, "No thank you!"

Building Blocks of Language

A useful metaphor for learning to read is to imagine the building of a palace. If it is to stand high, it must first have a secure foundation. Each stone from the bottom up must be squarely in place, or the whole mass will come tumbling down. In reading, our building blocks are the sounds of letters. In order to build with these blocks we also need some understanding of different syllable types and the rules that help us know how to sound them out. If we play with each new kind of syllable and each new rule as we learn them, one by one, we can feel confidence and pride at every step. We can build a castle for our language to be the dwelling place of our thoughts. We can build a boat for our language to sail through reading with every board tightly caulked and the wind forever at our backs.

The Power of Games: A Neurologist's Perspective

Recent finds in neurology allow me to say with confidence that games offer us more than immediate pleasure. Playing these games stimulates growth in the brain's communication pathways... These developing pathways, in turn, will strengthen the lightning-speed responses that are necessary for fluid reading. Nerve impulses are constantly circulating communication back and forth and around between **sounds, symbol representation** (letters, phonemes, and words) and **meanings**. You see a letter or a word; you think how it is sounded; you register a meaning. If the meaning doesn't make sense, you may reconsider your pronunciation. You may reconsider the letter. Did you perhaps misread, or could the print have been in error? Back and forth and around you go on the circle as you clarify the meaning behind the print."

If you are interested, you can order Game Packs from Mrs. Morse at ekm@gamepacksforlearning.com.

