Improving the educational experiences and outcomes of students on the autism spectrum

Founded by parents in 2009, Partnership for Extraordinary Minds (xMinds) has a unique mission among organizations serving individuals with autism: to improve their educational experiences and outcomes. Given appropriate support that addresses their strengths and social, emotional, and cognitive needs, many students on the autism spectrum can learn the academic and adaptive skills necessary to pursue higher education and/or meaningful work. xMinds endeavors to create synergy among parents, educators, professionals, and policy makers that can lead to life-changing benefits for these students.

Join us in our mission. Become a member today at www.xMinds.org.

As a volunteer-run nonprofit, we depend on the support of our members—families, educators, and professionals—to help us fulfill our mission by providing information to our community about the ways autism can affect how children learn and behave and effective strategies to improve their academic and functional skills, and by advocating for improved educational programming and services.

Family Memberships ($40 annually) include:
- Family directory
- Admission to speaker meetings, parent workshops, and family events
- xMindsResource, a members-only monthly newsletter with helpful resources that focus on autism, education, special education law, and advocacy

Educator Memberships ($20 annually) include:
- Educator directory
- Admission to speaker meetings
- xMindsResource, a members-only monthly newsletter with helpful resources that focus on autism, education, special education law, and advocacy

Professional Memberships ($80/$150 annually) include:
- Inclusion in the professional services directory hosted on our website
- An introduction in our free newsletter, xMindsWire, which is received monthly by more than 500 people, mostly in the Maryland/D.C. area
- Admission to speaker meetings
- xMindsResource, a members-only monthly newsletter with helpful resources that focus on autism, education, special education law, and advocacy

In addition, professional organization membership includes:
- Announcement of events or programs in the xMindsWire
- Distribution of printed materials at our meetings and events

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Extraordinary Speakers: Helping Students on the Autism Spectrum

Location: Rockville Memorial Library (21 Maryland Avenue, Rockville, MD 20850)
Members: free; Nonmembers: $15/lecture

► Helping Students with Written Expression
Thursday, October 2; 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Why is the writing process such a struggle for many children on the autism spectrum? These students have a lot to say, but struggle to get their ideas on paper, because even simple writing tasks require skills in language, organization, sensory regulation, and motor control. This presentation will explain how writing demands impact children on the spectrum and will provide strategies that parents and teachers can use to help.

Esther Goetz, M.S., CCC-SLP, is the Senior Speech-Language Pathologist for the Lower and Middle School at The Katherine Thomas School. She has been a practicing clinician in New York and Maryland since 1995, specializing in work with children on the autism spectrum and children with learning disabilities.

Katherine Hartley, B.S., is a certified special education teacher at the Katherine Thomas School, and is finishing her Masters degree from Johns Hopkins in Special Education.

► Safeguarding Your Child’s Experience on the Internet
Thursday, November 13; 7:00–9:00 p.m.

How can parents ensure a safer, more supportive online experience for a child, teen, or young adult on the autism spectrum? This presentation will explain how technology impacts your child’s social and emotional development; how to protect your child against the dangers of the internet, social media, cyber bullying, and video gaming; and how to safeguard your child’s persona and experience.

Dr. Jamell White, Ph.D., is a therapist and care coordinator for adults and children with developmental disabilities. She oversees JSSA’s Center for Autism Through the Lifespan and specializes in social skills therapy groups for children with autism spectrum disorders. Ms. White is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Psychiatry (child and adolescent) with Georgetown University School of Medicine.

Andrew McGahan, LCSW, LICSW, specializes in working with children and adolescents, foster care and adoption programs, family therapy, and anger management. His areas of expertise include ADHD, bullying, depression and anxiety in children and adults, and autism spectrum disorders.

► Technology Tools to Enhance Independence and Learning in Students on the Spectrum
Tuesday, October 14; 7:00–9:00 p.m.

Learn how technology can assist students on the spectrum with both verbal and written communication, expression, executive functioning, and organization, and communication. The best technology tools for helping students navigate social environments will also be reviewed, as well as behavior management and tracking technologies to aid both students and educators. The presentation will address student needs across the spectrum. An extensive set of online resources and video demonstrations of the technologies will be provided.

Dr. Katharina Boser, Ph.D., is the President of Individual Differences in Learning, Inc, an educational non-profit in Maryland providing professional development to teachers and parents regarding brain-based teaching techniques and innovative technologies for students with a range of cognitive differences, including autism and twice exceptionality. Dr. Boser was a board member and then co-chair of the Innovative Technologies for Autism Initiative for Autism Speaks until 2011. She is a co-editor of Technology Tools for Students with Autism.

► Effective Collaboration and Dispute Resolution in Public Schools
Thursday, December 11; 7:00–9:00 p.m.

How can parents advocate for their children with special needs without adversely affecting their relationship with school staff? What are the keys to effective parent-teacher collaboration? This presentation will explain ways parents can work collaboratively with educators and resolve disagreements. The session will explain how formal disputes are handled from within MCPS and will discuss how to build relationships with school staff.

Brian K. Gruber, Esq., is a lawyer in private practice, representing the parents of students with disabilities and learning differences. Mr. Gruber has more than 17 years of experience navigating the IEP process and working collaboratively with school systems to achieve results for his clients.

Ashley VanCleave, Esq., supervises the Equity Assurance and Compliance Unit of the Montgomery County Public Schools, monitoring and supporting compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which includes the oversight of IDEA dispute resolution mechanisms. Ms. VanCleave focuses on creating collaborative, student-centered solutions for school staff and families.

www.xMinds.org

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