

HOPE FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM IS COMING TO THE NORTHWEST SUBURBS



By Deanna Jaconetti-Tyrpak and Linda Cervenka

Soaring Eagle Academy, founded by Speech Language Pathologists, Linda Cervenka, Deanna Jaconetti-Tyrpak, and Michele Ricamato, will be the first school in the Midwest committed to a social and academic learning environment for students aged 3 to 21 diagnosed with Autism. The school will combine Illinois Learning Standards with a relationship based methodology called the DIR® (Developmental Individual-Difference Relationship) Approach. This educational opportunity is not currently offered in the public or private schools in IL.

What is Autism? Autism is a complex neurological disorder that involves a range of delays in communication, social interaction, cognitive and motor abilities. Today, Autism affects 1 in every 150 children and has become a national epidemic. There are many widely accepted misconceptions about children with Autism that have led to the lowering of educational expectations. At Soaring Eagle Academy we will challenge those misconceptions and empower our students to soar.

What is different about the philosophy of Soaring Eagle Academy? We believe that children with Autism have the capacity to use meaning-

ful communication, be problem solvers and creative thinkers, and develop rich relationships. The Academy will provide a comprehensive program that fosters emotional development as the foundation for learning and social skills. Academically, students will have access to the Illinois educational curriculum for Reading, Math, Social Science and Science. Each child's individualized program will be developed by utilizing their natural interests, the DIR® Approach and Illinois Learning Standards Goals and Benchmarks.

What is different about the daily program of students attending Soaring Eagle Academy? Each child with autism is unique and requires a thorough understanding of their strengths, challenges and differences to truly provide an appropriate education for them. For each child, we will create a joy for learning in a calm and nurturing environment based on their individual needs and interests. Curriculum will be interactive and dynamic; children will feel, see and hear the information. This multi-sensory approach is provided so students can learn the way they know best. Each child will be respected and supported throughout the day and their behaviors will be seen as clues to their world.

We see children with autism for who they are and try to understand the underlying meaning of their behaviors, so strategies for coping can be developed. Family involvement is viewed as a central component; parents are welcome in our classrooms and therapy sessions.

What is DIR®? The DIR® approach was developed 20 years ago by Drs. Stanley Greenspan, M.D. and Serena Wieder, PhD. It is a unique approach that focuses on the whole child looking at 1) a child's developmental milestones critical for healthy emotional and intellectual growth 2) the unique way the child processes information in their world and 3) how the child interacts and builds relationships. This model embraces the emotional development of the child as the key to growth of their mind and body. DIR® techniques encourage children to engage in dynamic, interactive and meaningful communication and learning. The power of human connections and relationships is the key to life success. Soaring Eagle Academy is the key to positive change in our community for children with Autism.

For more information or to make a donation, please call (312) 683-5151 or visit the web site www.soaringeagleacademy.org.