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New Program Focuses on Social Skills for Kids with Autism

By Jennifer Wake



MAPSS students take an art break with counselors before outdoor activities

Photo Jennifer Wake

Several Lamorinda students on the autistic spectrum participated in a unique camp this summer called MAPSS (Mental and Physical Social Skills) at Bancroft Elementary School in Walnut Creek.

The program was created by certified fitness expert Adam Feisterstein, board certified behavior analyst Tanya Scott, and educational specialist Meredith Akers to offer a positive setting for social skills and fitness routines that increase confidence, self-esteem and social behavior.

"Meredith and I have primarily provided support in schools and homes. We have always talked about the idea of social groups and camps in our plans and when a colleague of ours introduced us to Adam, a great team was formed," Akers said. "Combining our focus on social skills, promoting appropriate behavior and passion for building community with a health and fitness component was a great fit."

According to Akers, many of the kids at MAPSS would not experience success on a traditional sports team or during recess and PE, not only feeling unsuccessful with their abilities to participate in physical activities but also feeling unsuccessful socially.

"Our program supports kids in experiencing success both in physical activities as well as in social activities," she said. "They are taught physical activities that promote team work and group collaboration but they are also taught fitness activities that they can do themselves at home."

This fall, MAPSS will be offering afterschool classes at the Moraga Commons, as well as in Berkeley, Oakland and Walnut Creek, and it hopes to expand of-

fering to Lafayette in January. Class size will range from six to 10 students with a 5 to 1 student to staff ratio.

"The fall program will involve behaviorists along with fitness instructors, focusing on social skills, group participation, exercise routines, sports and calisthenics," Feisterstein said. The typical age range for MAPSS is 5 to 18, but there is also a transition program for young adults over the age of 18 which will begin in September.

"We are teaching skills kids will use for life to build and maintain healthy bodies as well as healthy relationships," Akers said. "I don't know of any other programs that have a fitness focus with the collaboration of educational and behavioral support."

For information, contact Feisterstein at wearemapss@gmail.com.

Science in the Kitchen ~ Easy Experiments for Kids

By Jonathan Winter



Friends Iain Anderson and Jefferson Wake compare two soaps from experiment

Photo Jennifer Wake

Did you ever think about how your microwave works? Microwaves are a kind of light energy that you can't see called *electromagnetic radiation* (ER). Microwaves, like all ER, travel in the form of waves, like the waves you see at the beach. These waves heat things by moving the water molecules inside your food. They are very handy to use in a kitchen because they are not absorbed by the glass, or ceramic or plastic that you cook with. Here are a couple of experiments that you can safely do with a microwave. You might have to adjust the times in these experiments depending on the power of your microwave.

1. Gather these supplies to find your microwave's hot spots:
Chocolate Bar
Plate

Remember that ER travels in waves? When two waves come together, and the top or crest of a wave hits another crest, the two combine and you get a wave that's twice as big. When a crest hits a trough (the lowest point of a wave) the two waves cancel each other out. You can see where the big waves are with the chocolate bar.

2. Start your first experiment:

If your microwave has a turntable, take it out. Put the chocolate bar on the plate and into the microwave. Heat it for 30 seconds on *High*, then take it out and put back in the turntable.

The chocolate bar will have melted unevenly. The spots where the bar is melted are where the bar was hit by the double-big waves. (The turntable is to spin your food so it cooks more evenly. In this case we wanted our experiment to cook unevenly.)

Don't eat your chocolate yet!
3. Gather these supplies for gas experiments in the microwave:

Bowl of water
Plate
Paper towel
Bar of Ivory brand soap
Marshmallow

4. Start your second experiment

Step A:
Put the marshmallow in the bowl of water. You should notice that it floats. Take it out and put in the soap bar. It floats too, right? That's because there are lots of little air bubbles trapped in the marshmallow and the soap, making them *buoyant*.

Step B:

Put the soap on a paper towel and microwave it on *High* for 1 minute.

What happened?
As the tiny water molecules in the soap heated up, they heated the air around them. The air expanded, or pushed out, enlarging the soap.

Can you guess what will happen to the marshmallow?

Step C:
Put the marshmallow on the plate and into the microwave. Heat it on *High* for 30 seconds

What happened?
As you may have guessed, the marshmallow expanded just like the soap, due to the heating of the air inside it.
If you have any graham crackers nearby, you can combine the marshmallow and chocolate on one to make a delicious s'more. Then you can use your expanded soap to wash up in the bathtub!

Jonathan Winter has been a science teacher at Lafayette Elementary School in Lafayette since 2001. He lives in Moraga with his wife, children, numerous pets - and he experiments frequently in his kitchen.

Taking Charge of College Admissions

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

Many parents can recall the days when students applied to one, or perhaps two or three colleges, got accepted to their first choice school, and were done. Today, when eleven million readers across the nation eagerly await the annual August issue of US News and World Report on college rankings, those days seem far behind us and college admissions seems unduly stressful. There are many reasons why this is so. First, thanks to the Baby Boomer generation, there are more high school graduates, and more of these students plan to attend college. In 1997 there were 2.3 million high school graduates compared to 3.3 million in 2009. Projections indicate these numbers will remain high until at least 2022. In addition, the demand for higher education has risen steadily, translating into greater numbers of applicants. For many, a college degree is viewed as the path to economic security, and studies confirm a strong correlation between earnings and educational attainment.

On their part, colleges have responded to increased demand by aggressively reaching out to prospective applicants. Colleges are escalating marketing efforts to attract large and diverse pools of qualified applicants. Broad student recruitment and direct outreach continue to grow in popularity both nationally and abroad. Schools send students multiple letters, attractive guidebooks and invitations to attend regional college conferences and visit campuses for specially arranged tours. College admissions officers visit local high schools and host booths at college fairs. And, of course, technology makes it easier than ever to access college Web sites, take virtual tours and prepare college applications. The Common Application, a standardized form that can be completed once and submitted electronically, has simplified the process; it is currently used by over 350 colleges nationwide.

These trends result in more students applying to more

schools than ever before. Yet this is only part of the reasons for the increased stress. Digging a bit deeper, we see that the sources of anxiety afflicting many families are fairly limited in scope. Admission stress is most felt by students who are applying to the 50 most prestigious colleges and universities in the country. More students are competing for the same number of freshmen spots at these institutions, so many otherwise qualified applicants simply cannot get in. Unfortunately, heightened media attention on these colleges makes it appear more difficult to gain entry to colleges and universities everywhere. The overall impact on students and parents can be nerve-racking. The pressure mounts to take more challenging coursework, register for increasingly earlier test prep, and hire expensive consultants to help students "get into" to the "right" college. College admissions has become big business, and students are the consumers. Education begins to be treated as a commodity rather than a public good. The competition creates a game of winners and losers, and the quality of education may become compromised.

There are a few simple guidelines that can help students reclaim the college admissions process. First, control what you can control. With all the hype, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that it is you, the student, who should be highly selective in the college she chooses. It is the student who must research and select colleges that meet her interests, needs and academic goals. Next, plan ahead and start early. Involve yourself in activities that are exciting to you. Colleges admit students who take grades seriously, challenge themselves and demonstrate consistent involvement in a couple of activities they are passionate about. Taking charge also means taking an honest look at areas for improvement and focusing on these during the high school years. Being a senior is far more fun and rewarding if you prepare

the groundwork by doing what needs to be done in the first three years. No matter when you get started, the secret is good organization and planning, and applying to colleges that are a good match for you. It is helpful to remember that a good, often a great education can be had at more than 2500 colleges nationwide, and most of these institutions accept 50 to 80 percent of their applicants.

My column will appear regularly through the 2009-2010 academic year. Seniors can look forward to reading about what needs to get done and when. Younger students can learn much about what lies ahead and focus attention on the high schools years as a time to prepare for college. Topics will include college selection criteria and fit, getting organized, teacher recommendations, standardized testing, essays and interviews, college visits, financial aid and more. In the spring, I may be persuaded to share hidden gems—colleges I visit that could be a perfect fit for next year's graduating class! For now, enjoy the last days of summer. In September we will get to work!



Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D. is an independent college admissions advisor located in Lafayette, California. Her goal is to help students and their families understand the college admissions process, research college and career options, create a college list and prepare a strong, organized and cohesive application. Dr. LaScala is a member of NACAC, WACAC, and HECA and earned a certification in College Admissions and Career Planning from University of California at Berkeley. Contact her at (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com.

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