

## 4-H Council discusses upcoming series of events for local students

By Courtney M. Cox  
4-H Council reporter

BUTLER — The Choctaw County 4-H Council met January 16, 2007 at the Extension Office in Butler. The meeting was called to order by Mariah Logan, president, and Amanda Taylor, vice-president led the pledges.

All new business was discussed. Everyone was reminded of the County Speaking Program and

Have I Got A Story Program competitions on Jan. 30, which will begin at 7 p.m. at the Extension Office. Also, all eXtreme Birdhouses projects are to be turned in by January 31 to the Extension Office.

We then played a really fun new game, the potato relay race. It was a great indoor activity! The program for the meeting, a workshop for the "Speak-Up program" and the "Have I Got A Story" program, was presented by Mrs. Susan Thompson,

Regional Extension Agent and Mrs. Elaine B. Alberson, Retired County Extension Coordinator. Some of the students gave a short speech about themselves, just to get a little practice speaking in front of an audience.

Following the program everyone enjoyed refreshments compliments of Mrs. Alberson and Mrs. Thompson.

The next 4-H County Council meeting will be held Tuesday, Jan. 30.

## What your special needs child is entitled to by law

By law, children with special needs are entitled to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that includes the following:

- **Current performance.** The IEP must state how the child is currently doing in school (known as present levels of educational performance). This information usually comes from the evaluation results such as classroom tests and assignments, individual tests given to decide eligibility for services or during reevaluation, and observations made by parents, teachers, related service providers, and other school staff. It also includes information about how the child's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general curriculum.

- **Annual goals** -- those that the child can reasonably accomplish in a year. The goals are broken down into short-term objectives or benchmarks, and may be academic, address social or behavioral needs, relate to physical needs, or address other educational needs.

- **Special education and related services.** The IEP must list the special education and related services to be provided to the child or on behalf of the child, including supplementary aids and services that the child needs. It also includes any changes to the program or school personnel, such as training or professional development, that will be provided to assist the child.

- **Participation with non-disabled children.** The IEP must explain the extent (if any) to which the child will not participate with non-disabled children in the regular class and other school activities.

- **Participation in state and district-wide tests.** The IEP must state what modifications in the administration of required assessments the child will need. If a test is not appropriate for the child, the IEP must state why the test is not appropriate and how the child will be tested instead.

- **Dates and places.** The IEP must state when services will begin, how often they will be provided, where they will be provided, and how long they will last.

- **Measuring progress.** The IEP must state how the child's progress will be measured and how parents will be informed of that progress.

- **Transition service needs.** Beginning when the child is age 14 (or younger, if appropriate), the IEP must address the courses he or she needs to take to reach his or her post-school goals. Beginning when the child is age 16 (or younger, if appropriate), the IEP must state what transition services are needed to help the child prepare for leaving school.

- **Age of majority.** Beginning at least one year before the child reaches the age of majority, the IEP must include a statement that the student has been told of any rights that will transfer to him or her at the age of majority.

**"We're a very close-knit group. We're really like one big family."**



HIM clerk Ada Smith says that family atmosphere translates into better care for patients.

**"Even though we're handling charts, we're also handling people's lives and that's very important."**

Smith says that attention to detail is extremely important in a patient's medical record. That's why the HIM staff works so hard together to make sure that everything is done right. "I love working here, the people are so nice and everyone is dedicated to their jobs," Smith said. Apparently, her co-workers think the same about her as they selected her as the January 2007 Employee of the Month.



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Submitted photo

Pictured at the 4-H council meeting are Susan Thompson, Regional Extension Agent who talked about the 4-H Speak-Up Alabama program, Elaine Alberson, Retired County Extension Coordinator who talked about the Have I Got A Story Program, (seated) Mariah Logan, Courtney Morgan Cox, Hannah McDougal, Haley Anderson, and (standing) Bethany McDougal and Amanda Taylor.

### ■ IEP's

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alized Education Plan (IEP).

A kindergarten student at Southern Choctaw Elementary, Anna, who has Down's Syndrome, is one of a growing number of students who fall into the category of Special Education. Special needs children now make up about 13% of the nation's enrollment in public schools, and those children are entitled, by law, to certain provisions while attending school.

According to state and federal law, students with special needs must have an IEP written for them prior to each school year. The plan is put together by a team of educators and therapists, along with the parents, to set up the student's schedule for needed therapies and to set educational goals that will be strived for throughout the year. By law, the IEP must include certain information about the child and the educational program designed to meet his or her unique needs.

The state Dept. of Education deems such IEP plans as 'one of the most critical elements to ensure effective teaching, learning, and better results for all children with disabilities'. But the department goes even further by saying that the plan is 'the cornerstone of special education.'

But the Sikes family says that Anna's IEP planning meetings have not resulted in a completed plan. As of this week, Anna still has no IEP in place for the 2006-07 school year.

"We met in May before school got out last year to develop her IEP," says her mother. "Some things were not in place. We were told it would be June 8th for some of the plan to be put in place. But all through the summer, (now SCES principal) Jacqui James called and asked if we had met again. I told her 'no'. We met again shortly after school started, but still nothing. We've met three times since then. Still nothing."

During each of the scheduled meetings, Dawn says that one or more of the team members was not present, making it impossible to complete Anna's IEP.

According to the law, Anna's IEP must state how she is currently doing in school, decide goals that she can reasonably accomplish in a year, list

the special education and related services to be provided to her, explain the extent (if any) to which she will not participate with non-disabled children in the regular class and other school activities, and state when services will begin, how often they will be provided, where they will be provided, and how long they will last.

Because the Sikes' situation is under review, Special Education Coordinator for the school system Douglas Marsh said that he could not comment on the exact nature of their complaints. He did, however, comment on the general process for students who fall into Special Education.

Marsh told the Sun that there is a 90-day window for developing a student's IEP, with the last 30 days set up to design an IEP prior to the child beginning the school year. Sometimes, however, circumstances make it necessary to change the timeline.

"If, for example, during that period, the child is found to need hearing aides or glasses, or other evaluations like that," he explains. "This would mean that the time frame would change."

Students are often re-evaluated on a regular basis, even after the IEP plan is in place, to see that the plan continues to meet their needs, Marsh explained.

"Re-evaluation can take place more often, but must be done every three years," he says. "The team can see the need to change it within a few months — things that may not be working."

According to Marsh, occupational therapy services are contracted out to private therapists, a fact that makes provision of those services a little more complicated.

"They are hard to find and hard to contract out," he explains. "Occupational therapy is getting to be more permanent now than in the past. In the past, it was mainly used on a short-term basis for people who had a stroke or other problems like that. Now, it's used on a permanent basis, sometimes throughout the school years of a student."

According to Marsh, the school system also has one speech therapist and contracts out with others to provide services for all the students who require

it in all four schools.

"The student may get a recommendation from their physician to be evaluated for therapy," Marsh explains. "The therapists then evaluate them to determine what types of therapy they need and how often."

Anna is scheduled to receive both speech and occupational therapy through the school system and has been receiving both since school began, although she has had several therapy sessions that were cancelled and then rescheduled. But she is still waiting on her IEP to set therapy goals to work toward for the school year.

"The law says that there should never be an unnecessary interruption in the child's services," Dawn adds. "As far as her education goes, I have nothing but good things to say. They've all been right there for her. They've been wonderful to her."

But when it comes to Anna's special needs, Dawn says that her daughter is simply floundering without direction. She and her husband, along with their attorney, Perry Newton, have become increasingly vocal about the issue.

"The law is already broken," Dawn insists. "It's not that we've not made the effort. But it's just not been done."

There have, however, been recent efforts to correct Anna's lack of IEP.

"There has been no date set for another meeting," Dawn says. "But we did get a letter saying we would be given a date soon."

"I don't know what's going to come of this," she adds. "But I want her speech therapy provided. I want her occupational therapy provided. I want these things for her."

The Sikes family says that they only want what is guaranteed to Anna by law. But, they add, it's not just a matter of what's in the law. It's a matter of helping Anna reach her potential.

"We want her to be able to do the simple things — tie her shoes, count money," Dawn says. "We expect her to do the things other kids do. It just takes her longer."

"They want these children to function and do well in society," she adds. "But they have to give them a way to do it. That's what I want for my child, and I don't think I'm asking for too much."

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