NTDSE built to serve students’ needs

The Niles Township District for Special Education (NTDSE) occupies a unique place within public education in the area.


While the member districts all provide special education on their own, NTDSE works with all township students ages 3-22 who require more intensive service. Its staff is trained in disciplines such as speech and language pathology, art and music therapy, physical and occupational therapy, clinical and school psychology, and education of children with vision and hearing impairments, to name a few.

Students’ home districts and NTDSE work with the families of students with special needs to create an Individual Education Plan (IEP). That document lays out each student’s strengths, needs, treatment and goals for improvement.

Candice Hartranft, NTDSE’s Director of Special Education, said every student has the support of a team that includes parents, NTDSE teachers, home district representatives, and other service personnel. “Together that team works to identify the best setting to meet [a student’s] goals,” she said.

Classrooms with NTDSE teachers are located both at the Molloy Education Center and in member district schools. Of NTDSE’s total enrollment of 260, 114 students are at Molloy and 146 students are in one of 19 “satellite classrooms.”

Whether a student attends Molloy or a satellite depends upon the IEP, Hartranft said. “Molloy has some wonderful supports such as a therapy pool, a motor room, and a sensory room,” she said. “The satellites offer opportunities within the general education population with same-age, typical peers.”

The collaborative structure of NTDSE allows districts to meet the needs of a larger range of students more efficiently than if each had to offer all possible services on their own. At Molloy, students from throughout the township who require a high level of specific supports can be educated together to receive the services their IEP requires. Principal Christine Perry explained that Molloy offers “a continuum of services. The home district will first determine if a student’s needs can be met locally. If the district thinks a student needs more support, then they can reach out to NTDSE.”


This collaborative structure, Hartranft said, “gives the students the best education to meet their needs. We are always working toward as much independence as possible.”

NTDSE students supporting one another.
A casual conversation between two parents of children with special needs at the Morton Grove Fourth of July parade has blossomed into a fundraising organization that supports the work of the Niles Township District for Special Education and the Molloy Education Center.

Cary Izzi, vice president of a Chicago-based food service company, was one of those parents. His son, who has autism, is a graduate of NTDSE and now attends Niles West High School.

After that chance meeting at the parade, Izzi found himself wondering, “How many people know about this great school?” He was inspired to do something more.

And do something he has. Izzi is president of the SEED Foundation, incorporated in 2012 to support NTDSE’s mission. The group raises money throughout the year to fund opportunities for students in NTDSE programs, such as the playground, sensory room and motor room at Molloy, technology in NTDSE satellite classrooms, and grants to teachers.

Izzi estimates the group has awarded about $10,000 in grants (about $500 each) since its inception. Similar to grants from other school-based foundations, the awards allow teachers to do something extra for their students. “I read these grant applications, they put so much research and so much study into them,” he said. “I learned so much from the grants.”

The SEED Foundation is entirely run by volunteers. Parents and NTDSE staff members generously donate their time and effort. All who are willing to help are welcome, Izzi said, and more are needed. “We have two goals: raise money and raise awareness,” he said.

Parents of NTDSE students don’t need to be convinced of the benefits their children receive. “Our kids get the best service by far,” Izzi said. “The principal at Molloy taught my son how to put his coat on. To this day, he does it the exact same way. I think of her every time.”

For more information about the SEED Foundation, or to volunteer, visit https://www.ntdseseed.org.

SEED Foundation supports NTDSE efforts

The winning team at last year’s Trivia Night fundraiser included District 68 Board Member Joe Ruffner and Jennifer Ruffner (far left and second from left); Mrs. Berk former District 68 Board Member and NTDSE Governing Board Member Dr. Richard Berk, along with his wife, son, and daughter-in-law (center four); and District 68 Superintendent James Garwood and District 68 Board Member Frank Alkyer.

All can participate in Family Fun Night.

Upcoming SEED Foundation events include:
October 24: Family Fun Night
November 21: Holiday Boutique
April 25, 2020: Seventh Annual Trivia Night
Molloy celebrates decades of collaboration

It’s impossible to know whether educator Julia Sale Molloy would be surprised that the building named for her is still doing its work 50 years after its groundbreaking. But she surely would be gratified to know that the special education community she helped build in Niles Township is stronger than ever.

The vitality of that community will be on display from 1-4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 28 at a 50th anniversary celebration of the Molloy Education Center, 8701 Menard Ave. in Morton Grove. Molloy staff, families and volunteers are hosting a block party that will feature music, games, activities, food and family fun. The public is invited.

The Molloy Center is the home base for the Niles Township District for Special Education (NTDSE), an organization founded in the late 1950s by the township’s public school districts. NTDSE serves students between the ages of 3 and 22 with a wide range of disabilities. Students who require the most intense level of service attend Molloy; those who need less intense service attend one of the 19 “satellite” classrooms in member district schools throughout the township.

Long before ground was broken for the building in 1969, Julia Molloy worked with students with disabilities, and their families, to help them achieve as much independence as possible. Trained as a speech and language pathologist, she founded Orchard School in Skokie in the 1950s, and authored three books on teaching students with speech or learning impairments.

Orchard outgrew two Skokie locations before settling into the building that is located on Menard Ave. in Morton Grove today. In 1970, it was renamed for Julia Molloy, the building’s first principal. She left that position in 1975, and passed away in 1983.

Molloy’s successor as principal, Fern Frank, is a living link between the Molloy Center’s early history and the present. Almost 90, Frank spent her career in education at the Center.

Frank was inspired by her own experience as a parent of a child with special needs. Wanting to learn how to help her son, Michael, she went to school for certification. She began as a substitute teacher, then a full-time teacher, and was eventually named as principal of Molloy. She credits both Julia Molloy and Vernon Frazee, an early NTDSE Director, as positive influences on her.

“What they have done far exceeds what I have done,” she said.

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扩张可能在Molloy的未来

在Molloy教育中心，学校官员正在庆祝过去并为将来做准备。

他们预计学生人数将继续增长，被Niles镇区特殊教育区（NTDSE）服务。据Kathy Gavin，NTDSE的财政服务总监说，该地区的人数在过去四年中增长了20%以上。

Molloy主任Christine Perry将一些增长归因于NTDSE的成功。“我们已经变得更好，使社区了解服务的可用性，”她说。

同时，一部分的入学增长已被吸收，因为“卫星”（NTDSE运营的位于成员学区学校的教室），这将不足以确保所有学生将被良好服务在未来。

结果，NTDSE领导者正在考虑第二次扩大Molloy中心。在1999年，该中心的南部端的一个扩建工程被完成。

学生人数不是空间需求的唯一因素。该建筑的建设在1989年之前就已建成，Molloy与有特殊需要的学生及其家庭合作，以帮助他们实现尽可能的独立。

Perry指出，教室不能总是容纳学生和他们可能需要的设备，例如特殊轮椅。

Gavin说，从一个区域到另一个区域，有时必须通过体育馆，这可能在使用该空间时是不可用的。她还说，实验室空间很紧张，这可能使它很难为协同的工作人员提供。

NTDSE在最近几年中将四所早期幼稚班教室搬离Elizabeth Meyer School。然而，Gavin说，这些建筑已经填满。

Gavin说，扩张将重新配置教室，增加功能性的生活技能空间，改进办公室空间，提高可访问性。NTDSE的管理人员和董事会成员才刚刚开始讨论项目细节和资金。

Gavin说，扩张可能需要三年时间。如果要完成，她认为，因为Molloy是全年开放的。如她所说，“我们必须有创意。”
Molloy celebrates

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Frank believes the Molloy Center has been a trailblazer in the field. “Molloy was the first school if its kind; other schools followed,” she said. She noted that her son felt a sense of belonging at the school, and the staff helped him learn to be on his own. “Mrs. Molloy insisted that children be treated well and learn as much independence as they can,” she said.

That determination continues today. “The teachers really help with independence and partnering with families,” Principal Christine Perry said. “We had a parent who really just wanted to go to Dunkin Donuts and have coffee with friends. Our teachers take kids to the cafeteria to learn how to behave in restaurants. We run shuttles to stores, malls, bowling alleys, etc., all to help the students practice their independence.”

Perry, who is on the committee of staff and volunteers who are putting on the anniversary celebration, sees it as a chance to tell Molloy’s story. “People in the community don’t really know about us,” she said. “I feel like Molloy is a hidden gem.”

Kathy Gavin, NTDSE’s Director of Fiscal Services, agrees. “Molloy is a very special place. A lot of our staff live in the surrounding community, and some have had family members here as students,” she said. “It’s very moving to me how committed families are to stay connected with us. And former staff, too.”

There’s a particular family connection that illustrates how deep feelings about Molloy run. Fern Frank’s granddaughter, Alexandra Frank, has been employed by NTDSE for seven years as a speech-language pathologist, working both at Molloy and in satellite classrooms. “My grandma is the main reason I went into this field,” said the younger Frank, known as AJ. “We had a conversation when I was in high school about what I wanted to do,” AJ said. “She said I should be a speech pathologist because if she were reincarnated that’s what she would be.”

She finds working in the “family business” to be rewarding. “I was pleased to be offered the job without anyone having knowledge of my relation to my grandma,” she said. “It’s been really nice working with many employees that she hired and then becoming friends with them myself. I enjoy the variety of my caseload and love working for NTDSE!”