



NTDSE Empowers

A publication of Niles Township District for Special Education #807

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NTDSE built to serve students' needs

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

The district is a collaboration of nine elementary districts: Golf School District 67, Skokie School District 68, Skokie-Morton Grove School District 69, Morton Grove School District 70, Niles School District 71, Skokie School District 72, Skokie School District 73, Skokie School District 73½, and Lincolnwood School District 74.

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



NTDSE students supporting one another.

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."

The NTDSE collaboration reaches beyond member districts. Nearby districts who contract with NTDSE to provide services include Niles Township High School District 219, Des Plaines School District 62, East Maine School District 63, Park Ridge-Niles School District 64, Rhodes School District 84½ in River Grove, and Maine Township High School District 207.

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."



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.

SEED Foundation supports NTDSE efforts

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,



All can participate in Family Fun Night.

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>.

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



Julia S. Molloy
(from 1966)

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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Expansion may be in Molloy's future

At the Molloy Education Center, school officials are celebrating the past while preparing for the future.

They expect continued growth in the number of students served by the Niles Township District for Special Education (NTDSE). According to Kathy Gavin, NTDSE's Director of Fiscal Services, the district's enrollment has grown more than 20 percent over the last four years.

Molloy Principal Christine Perry attributes some of the growth to NTDSE's success. "We've just become better at making the community aware of the services available," she said.

While a portion of the enrollment growth has been absorbed by an increase in the number of "satellites" (NTDSE-run classrooms located in member district schools), that alone won't be enough to ensure that all students will be well served in the future.

As a result, NTDSE leaders are looking into expanding the Molloy Center for the second time. An addition on the southern end of the building was completed in 1999.

Student numbers are not the only factor driving the need for space. The original building was built more than 20 years before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Gavin noted that parts of the building are not ADA-compliant.

Perry noted that classrooms can't always accommodate both students and the equipment they might require, such as special wheelchairs.

Gavin said individuals going from one section of the building to another sometimes must pass through the gymnasium, which can be disruptive when the space is being used. She also said office space is tight, which can make it difficult for staff members to collaborate.

NTDSE freed up classroom space at Molloy in recent years by moving four Early Childhood classes into Elizabeth Meyer School in member District 73½. However, Gavin said those rooms are already filled.

The goals for expansion would be to reconfigure to add classrooms, add functional life-skills spaces, improve office space and improve accessibility. NTDSE administrators and board members are just beginning to discuss project details and funding.

Gavin said that the expansion could take three years. It would have to be done in increments, she noted, because Molloy is open year-round. As she put it, "We will have to be creative."



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Join us from 1-4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 28 to celebrate Molloy Center's 50th anniversary! See page 3.

Molloy celebrates

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Frank believes the Molloy Center has been a trailblazer in the field. "Molloy was the first school of 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

NTDSE history

- 1952: Seeing a need based on her experience as a speech pathologist, Julia S. Molloy founds the Orchard School for Retarded Children in Skokie.
- 1955: The Orchard School moves to a new, larger building in Skokie, built with donated land and materials.
- 1958: The 10 public school districts in Niles Township form the Niles Township Department of Special Education (NTDSE).
- 1969: Ground is broken for a new Orchard School in Morton Grove.
- 1970: Orchard School is renamed the Julia S. Molloy Education Center.
- 1999: Molloy Center expands, building a southern addition.
- 2002: NTDSE changes formal structure from a multi-district cooperative to District 807.
- 2005: NTDSE becomes an all-elementary district.

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!"

NTDSE Empowers is a community newsletter published twice a year by Niles Township District for Special Education #807.

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- John Vranas, District 74

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Governing board meetings are held in the Molloy Education Center, 8701 Menard Ave., Morton Grove See <http://www.ntdse.org> for a schedule. All are invited to attend.

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