

September 1, 2011

Dear Parents,

Your child is invited to participate in the 2011-2012 RAE Special Buddies program!

As you know childhood has many challenges and these challenges are even greater when a child has a disability. Recognizing the opportunity we have to make a positive difference in our school environment, the mission of "You've Got a Friend in Me!" Special Buddies is to extend a caring hand to our children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

What's happening with RAE Special Buddies?

- Last year Special Buddies expanded to Odessa Kilpatrick Elementary, Wood Creek Jr. High and Beckendorff Jr. High in Katy and we hope to begin the program at Stanley and Rylander Elementary Schools this year.
- Being a buddy in the school environment is wonderful but we also want you to know that it would be awesome to see our buddies spend some time together outside of the school environment. A few buddies have done so this past spring and summer by planning swimming dates, bowling dates, becoming Challenger baseball buddies as well as inviting their buddies to each other's birthday parties.
- The Special Olympics Texas Project Unify Meet in the Middle Program has been incorporated into our Special Buddies program at RAE. Our current activities have helped us meet the requirements to be a part of this program. This also allows our school to host a Special Olympics Texas Meet in the Middle Sports Day Event!
- As approved by Katy ISD, we will be featured on Family Network TV's Buddy Talk show. Family Network TV is WebTV and Radio Programming for the Special Needs Community.
- To learn more about Family Network TV, visit <http://www.familynetworkradio.com/>

PLEASE NOTE:

IF our RAE Special Buddies enrollment is very large this school year, we will have two types of buddies: Special Buddies and Special Buddies Associates.

- Special Buddies are those children who have been specifically selected by Special Education teachers, Ms. Smith and myself to buddy a student with an intellectual & developmental disability. As in the past, the Special Buddies will have an opportunity to spend time with their buddy as the school curriculum allows and will be able to participate in activities such as recess, story time, music time, lunch time, Special Buddies Campaigns, and all Special Buddies events. Most of all, Special Buddies are expected to practice being good friends to their buddy!

- Special Buddies Associates are children who are a part of special buddies but are not assigned to a student with intellectual & developmental disabilities. Special Buddies Associates will learn about our students with IDD. Special Buddies Associates will also be included in the "Friends Who Care" Event and will be invited to our RAE Special Buddies campaign events and our year-end celebration.

We currently have a Special Buddies **Facebook** group page where we will add our updates. Just search RAE Special Buddies, or follow the link that is posted on our RAE PTA Facebook group page. Special Buddies is a closed group (for privacy reasons) so you will need to click on "request to join." Updates will also be included in our RAE monthly newsletter.

If your child would like to participate this year, please complete the attached forms and return them to school via your child's homeroom teacher by September 19, 2011. We hope to have buddy assignments delivered by mid to late October since this is quite an intricate process.

In Friendship,
Monica McDivitt, Program Founder
RAE PTA Special Buddies Coordinator
specialbuddiescoordinator@raepta.org



Our Vision:

Every child's school experience plays a major role in their accomplishments and we are optimistic that every child can be successful both, academically and socially, as long as they are in a community where all children are valued and belong.

Our vision is to create an environment where differences are accepted and attempts are made to educate those who may be fearful or unaware in relation to the culture of disability. To ensure this type of setting exists at Roosevelt Alexander Elementary School, our hope is to help increase awareness of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and teach all children to embrace differences and become caring friends. If we empower our children to make this choice, then we will instill the values of honesty, responsibility, diversity, respect, and social interaction.

Our Mission:

Childhood has many challenges and these challenges are even greater when a child has a disability. Recognizing the opportunity we have to make a positive difference in our school environment, the mission of "You've Got a Friend in Me!" Special Buddies is to extend a caring hand to our children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Our Goals:

- To eliminate any fears or misconceptions that children who do not have intellectual and developmental disabilities might have about children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).
- To provide children with IDD and children without IDD the opportunity to socialize. This will contribute to each child's sense of purpose and self-esteem and provide positive skills for interpersonal relationships.
- To teach all children to embrace differences and become caring friends.
- To help all children learn that everyone has strengths, abilities, hopes and dreams and they each have something special to contribute to our school and community.
- To serve as a model program for other elementary schools in the Katy Independent School District.



To learn more about this program please contact:

Monica McDivitt, Program Founder
specialbuddiescoordinator@raepta.org
281-646-1881

Molly Timmis
mollyetimmis@katyisd.org
281-237-9395



PERMISSION TO PARTICIPATE

This year-long Project UNIFY program is funded by a grant awarded to Special Olympics by the US Department of Education, and Texas is one of eleven high activation states within the project. Meet in the Middle (MiM) is designed for students of all ages, both typically-developing as well as those with intellectual disabilities, to partner and participate in activities which focus on interactive, inclusive, and FUN opportunities that will increase acceptance and awareness of each student's unique strengths and talents while supporting fitness, disability awareness, academic achievement, and sports-related training. MiM materials are provided to schools free of charge, and the program is designed to benefit all involved.

Meet in the Middle will run through May 2012. Project activities are designed to parallel the school focus on TAKS testing, diversity and character education, and FitnessGram criteria. Your child's MiM group will commit to their choice of Project UNIFY initiatives and will be responsible for forming a student-led leadership team. Student leadership teams are encouraged to develop service learning projects in line with the MiM vision, and participating schools will hold a year-end rally or forum. Students will participate in group and individual or paired activities, and periodically may earn rewards from SOTX Project UNIFY Meet in the Middle for successful completion of various projects. Some or all of the participating schools will complete pre- and post- surveys to help determine the project impact on the school environment and student attitudes. More information is available at www.mimtexas.org and www.specialolympics.org/project_unify.aspx

By signing this form, you grant your child permission to participate in Project UNIFY Meet in the Middle through May 2012 and understand that as part of the discovery process, *general* information about different diagnoses and disabilities may be discussed to promote understanding and awareness. Confidentiality will be respected at all times. By signing you also grant permission for your child's image (photo or video) to appear on the Meet in the Middle website or in other Special Olympics Texas promotional materials.

Thank you,
Martha Dorow
Project UNIFY Meet in the Middle Coordinator

Please contact your student's Meet in the Middle Facilitator with questions or concerns:

Facilitating Teacher Name: Molly Timmis/Monica McDivitt

Phone: Timmis 281-237-9395 McDivitt 281-646-1881

Email: mollyetimmis@katyisd.org or jmsmcdivitt@yahoo.com

****Please return the following page with your signature; keep this page for your records.****

-----*Return this Page to MiM Facilitator*-----

MEET IN THE MIDDLE PERMISSION FORM

With my signature below, I grant _____

(Name of Student)

permission to participate in the 2011-2012 Meet in the Middle program. My signature also grants permission to use my student's image on the Meet in the Middle website or in other Special Olympics Texas promotional materials.

Printed Name of Parent/Guardian:

Signature of Parent/Guardian:

Date: _____

RAE SPECIAL BUDDIES EVENTS 2011-2012

1. Friends Who Care (developed by Easter Seals)

November 17, 2011

Time: 2:45-3:00 PM in the RAE GYM

This will be introduction to RAE Special Buddies. Special Buddies will participate in a FRIENDS WHO CARE® activity, designed to help children better understand what it means and how it feels to be a young person with a disability. This educational program gives students the opportunity to learn what is involved when someone has a disability and how they adapt to live life, go to school, or work as independently as possible.

2 Holiday Huddle

December 9, 2011

Time: 2:45-3:15 PM in the RAE GYM

Special buddies will meet as a group, enjoy a cookie and create a holiday craft.

3. Jeans for Genes Day

February 29, 2012

All day

EVERYONE is invited to help special buddies support rare diseases by wearing blue jeans.

4. Spread the Word to End the Word –

March 2, 2012

Time: 2:45-3:15 PM in the RAE GYM

Our RAE Special Buddies campaign to end the R-Word.

Spread the Word to End the Word is an ongoing effort by Special Olympics, Best Buddies International and their supporters to raise the consciousness of society about the dehumanizing and hurtful effects of the word “retard(ed)” and encourage people to pledge to stop using the R-word. The campaign, created by youth, is intended to engage schools, organizations and communities to rally and pledge their support at www.r-word.org in order to promote the inclusion and acceptance of people with intellectual disabilities. * A Best Buddies Ambassador will be our guest speaker.

5. Best Buddies Houston Friendship Walk

...Change a Life, One Step at a Time.

March 31, 2012 (off-campus and optional event, but everyone is invited to attend!)

Time will be posted as event approaches

The University of St. Thomas

3800 Montrose

Houston, Texas 77006-4626

The 4th Annual Friendship Walk and Festival – Supporters of Best Buddies Texas will walk and celebrate the Best Buddies mission of friendship, benefiting people with intellectual disabilities.

6. Special Olympics Texas Meet in the Middle Event

May 11, 2012

Time: 2:00 PM – 3:15 in the RAE Cafeteria

Motor Activities Training Program (MATP) Challenge Day. MATP is designed specifically for athletes who are unable to participate in traditional Special Olympics sports. It was created to enhance individuals' motor skills, sports skills and physical fitness.

Challenge Day is offered to meet the needs of every participant and lets the athlete share his/her developed skills with family and friends. Participants are awarded based on participation, not place. Instead of competitions, there are skill stations where athletes are given the opportunity to demonstrate their personal best.

7. Special Buddies and Meet in the Middle Year-End Celebration

May 25, 2012 (Monday or Friday)

Time: 2:45-3:15 PM in the RAE GYM

Special buddies will receive memory books and have ice cream (or other acceptable snack like popcorn or a cookie since many of our children with IDD do not like or eat ice cream)

MORNING ANNOUNCEMENTS:

September 23 – EKS Day (information on morning announcements) Children who registered for special buddies wear green in honor of Eunice Kennedy Shriver.

February 29 – Jeans for Genes Day (World Rare Disease Day)

March 2 – Spread the Word to End the Word