

An Exceptional Education

BY MARILYN CAMPBELL
THE CONNECTION

Maureen Kleinman wandered from booth to booth, speaking with representatives from schools that cater to students who have special needs. She asked questions about each school's resources and environment.

"I have been home schooling my daughter for 5 years," said Kleinman, an Arlington mother. Her daughter is 11 years old and her son is 9. "I want to find a school where my daughter's educational needs will be met, but also where her social and emotional needs will be met."

Kleinman was one of hundreds of local parents who attended the eighth annual Exceptional Schools Fair. The event is considered a clearinghouse for the region, a place where parents of children think and learn differently (regardless of their disability) can come and find the schools that are right for their children.

More than 30 schools from the mid-Atlantic region sent representatives to show what their schools have to offer and answer questions from parents. The event was held at American University in D.C., November 16.

The fair was founded by Bekah Atkinson,



PHOTO BY MARILYN CAMPBELL

Muriel Jeddlicka (left), admissions director of Oakwood School in Annandale, was on hand at The Exceptional Schools Fair to share information with parents.

director of admissions at the Sienna School, to provide a resource for parents whose lives literally changed overnight, or the moment they learned their children have a special need. The fair is a forum for parents to ex-

plore educational options for their children. Atkinson is clear, however, that it is not a forum for diagnosis or advice, but simply a helpful resource for parents who are facing an unknown future for their children, edu-

Exceptional Schools Fair offers parents a chance to learn more about schools for their children with special needs.

cationally, financially and emotionally.

"We have families coming from all over," said Tara Nappi, director of teacher education and curriculum development at Commonwealth Academy in Alexandria. "They are looking for a place where their children feel safe."

EVENT ORGANIZERS described the fair as an empowering day for parents who may feel isolated by their child's diagnosis.

"The Exceptional Schools Fair is a moment for families to see and learn that they have options; that they are not, in fact, isolated; that there are professional educators who are passionate about what they do in their school," said Atkinson.

"Whether [the need] is academic or social, it's so incredibly important that you work with professionals who understand your child and who are willing to collaborate with other professionals like speech therapists, occupational therapists and psychologists," said Lois McCabe, head of school for the Diener School in Potomac, Md.

For more information on schools that were part of The Exceptional Schools Fair, visit www.exceptionalschoolsfair.com.



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