

February 15, 2012

Dear Parents:

On Thursday evening, February 9, a parent meeting was held to highlight and discuss the process of transitioning from LICA to NSSEO. We were very pleased to see that the group represented parents of LICA students of all ages and from all programs. Many of the parents present have been part of the LICA family for a long time; in fact, one set of parents were former LICA students themselves. LICA is, in many ways, a family. We are excited about creating a new, blended family with NSSEO, a special education cooperative that has provided special education services for students with a wide range of disabilities for more than 40 years.

The intent of this letter is to provide a short summary of the parent meeting discussion. It began with a brief review of the discussions and activities that led us to this plan. LICA has witnessed several important changes in our field over the past decade. Students' hearing losses are now usually diagnosed at birth, intervention begins earlier, and technologically advanced hearing aids and cochlear implants provide students much improved access to sound as they learn language. As a result, there are fewer students who need comprehensive special education services at age three. Fewer students result in higher costs to districts for the same services. By eliminating some of the administrative costs associated with LICA, we believe that the excellent services and supports your students receive will continue, while we reduce/contain the costs our districts pay for those services. NSSEO is our logical partner because so many students in the LICA programs live in NSSEO districts. We have worked together diligently for the last 18 months to make the transition as smooth as we can for staff, students, parents, and our districts, and we are excited about new opportunities we will have as part of the NSSEO family. Our staff and students will have greater access to technology advancements and the staff will benefit from an ongoing series of comprehensive professional development offerings, two of the many strengths of NSSEO.

We discussed many of the aspects of LICA programs that will remain the same. The LICA programs at Forest School in Des Plaines, MacArthur Middle School in Prospect Heights, and John Hersey High School in Arlington Heights will all continue in their current locations. Most of the LICA staff - supervisors, teachers, diagnostic staff, aides, and interpreters will remain in their current roles. Our goal is that as your child begins school next fall, it will look very similar to other typical school years. NSSEO will continue to work with the 44 districts that are currently members of LICA. Those districts will all continue to be able to access NSSEO services for their deaf/hard of hearing students.

As NSSEO assumes responsibility for LICA programs and services, the program will be referred to as the NSSEO Deaf/Hard of Hearing Program. The D/HH program office space will be a part of the NSSEO facilities, located within a few miles of the current LICA office with new phone numbers, and new email addresses for many of the staff you know. As we transition, we will provide the new contact information and it is our plan that there will be no lapse in important communication between school and home.

During the meeting last week, we addressed several questions raised from parents. One of the questions was about the status of state special education funding. NSSEO leadership has taken an active role with the state department in advocating for equitable special education funding for students based on the level of intensity of their needs, and it is a leader in providing professional development opportunities and excellent programs and services to its students. LICA is proud to be joining an organization that is at the forefront of current practices and continued advocacy for students with a wide range of special needs. The importance of partnering with parents and community is an ongoing area of focus for NSSEO. Parents also asked about participation in NSSEO parent groups. We are happy that Linda Sohn and Angie Kubiak, LICA parent representatives, have already joined the NSSEO parent advisory group (PAC).

As we continue planning for the 2012-2013 school year, we will schedule an open house for parents, while continuing to provide written updates on our transition. We will also post updates on both the LICA and NSSEO websites. We hope that the meeting and continued updates and correspondence provide you with the assurances that first and foremost, our collective focus is on the needs of your children and we keep that focus as we make several decisions throughout the transition.

Please share any questions, comments or suggestions with us. We look forward to continuing our partnerships with families throughout the process. Thank you so much for your continued support and involvement.

Sincerely,

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