



CST CHATTER BOX

Top 10 Special Needs Apps of 2017

The following are the most popular special needs Bridgingapps reviews of 2017:

Choiceworks is an app for helping children complete daily routines and tasks, understanding and controlling feelings and to improve their patience. Caregivers, teachers, and therapists use this app with students diagnosed with autism (verbal and non-verbal), ADD, and other learning disabilities to keep them on task and motivated.

Avaz Lite is an AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) app that provides a voice for children with Autism and other complex communication needs. Avaz is a full-featured AAC app PLUS a training layer for caregivers.

Voice Dream reads aloud text that can be pulled from pdfs, web browsers, word docs, power point, HTML, Dropbox and many more. A powerful resource for anyone struggling with reading or hoping to reinforce reading.

I Can Have Conversations With You! is designed to help children with conversation and social skills. The app provides a unique solution to parents who want to empower their child to initiate, understand, and participate in conversations.



StepByStep is a therapeutic and educational tool which helps assess and improve the sequencing skills of every day tasks for kids and adults with impaired or developing cognition. StepByStep uses fun and clearly-illustrated sequences of Activities of Daily Living (ADLs), Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs), and Transfers. The app was designed by an occupational therapist and is appropriate for users of all ages with impaired or developing cognitive skills.

Visual Schedule Planner is a completely customizable visual schedule iPad app that is designed to give an individual an audio/visual representation of the "events in their day". In addition, events that require more support can be linked to an "activity schedule" or "video clip" to help model the task even further. The app is designed for individuals who may benefit from visual support to ease transitions, anxiety, or who simply need a way to visually represent their day.

DayCape is an app that allows therapists, teachers, parents, and even the child themselves to set up visual schedules. The app allows a user to set up activities for the child using pre-set pictures, or by uploading personalized images. Once the activities are set up, notifications show up on the child's device to remind them of the activities they have been assigned.

Birdhouse for Special Needs helps parents and caregivers organize and coordinate important health information regarding their child's disability. The simple to use app helps users keep data about ongoing care in one simple timeline. They can then analyze the data to discover patterns and develop a care plan.

Proloquo2Go is a symbol-based communication app that gives a voice to those who cannot speak. Proloquo2Go is an AAC (Augmentative and Alternative Communication) app used by people with autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and other diagnoses. It is available in English, Spanish, French, and Dutch for iPad, iPhone, iPod touch and Apple Watch.

WebMD for iPad has taken its database and search function into the mobile device technology market with its WebMD for iPad app.

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Special points of interest:

- ☺ Impacts of Social Media
- ☺ Pathways Programs
- ☺ State Testing Info
- ☺ State Testing Tips

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THE TECH CONCERN- DEPRESSION AND SUICIDE

How are our children benefiting from the integration of *leisure use* of technology? Sure, children may be able to maintain focus on a video game, as well as social media outlets through tweeting, Facebook, emails, texting and more, but are all of those interactions beneficial? Is the tech industry fostering unhealthy addictive behaviors?

Research shows a parallel between when there was an increase in the access to smartphones and the increases in teen depression and suicide. Studies have found that spending more time on social media has led to unhappiness, while unhappiness does not lead to more social media use. Those who avoided Facebook, for instance, reported feeling less depressed.

Time spent using social media means that teens may spend less time interacting with friends in person. "Interacting with people face to face is one of the deepest wellsprings of human happiness, without it, our moods start to suffer and depression often follows." One of the risk factors for suicide is feeling socially isolated.

Time spent using social media means that children may not be getting enough sleep. Sleep deprivation can lead to depression.

Let's make sound choices for our children and provide guidance so that use of social media outlets is limited. Doing something makes a difference. Doing nothing may result in undesired consequences.



References:

Twenge, Jean. *With teen mental health deteriorating over five years, there's a likely culprit.* The Conversation. November 14, 2017

Brooks, David. *How Evil is Tech?* The New York Times. November 20, 2017

More Community Resources!

Parents have expressed interest on events and activities focused on special needs children that are taking place in the area. We hope the following will interest you and/or your child!

Pathways for Exceptional Children

provides programs for students of all abilities ages 3–21. The vision of the program is to overcome society's limiting perception and low expectation of children with special needs and create a future for children of all abilities where they are included, valued, and empowered to redefine the world.

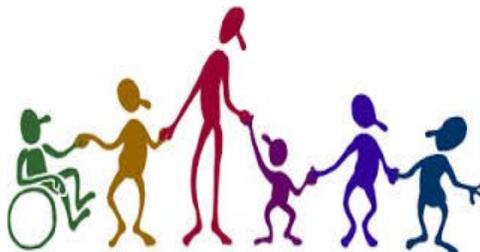
Their winter schedule is now available:

Ages 3-8, 9-12

Intro to Computer Programming
Thursdays-Jan. 18, 25; Feb. 1, 8, 15 & 22

Beauty and the Beast (teaching acting & social skills): Wednesdays starting Jan. 17

Bowling (promotes teamwork and social skills): Sundays starting Jan. 14 at



Boonton Lanes

Basketball (promotes teamwork and social skills): Wednesdays starting Jan. 17

Dancing with the Stars (dances choreographed from musicals and plays): Saturdays starting Jan. 20

PeeWee Cheerleading: Tuesdays starting Jan. 16

Magic of Reading (K-2 program solidifying basic literacy skills): Tuesdays and Thursdays starting Jan. 16

Ages 9-12, 13-21:

Learning through Cooking (learning about cooking, safety, money management, social skills): Thursdays starting Jan. 18

Ages 13-21:

Learning Through Life and Social Skills (learn to achieve greater independence with life skills): Tuesdays starting Jan. 16

Project Win Win (The program offers employment training where a child will work toward gaining paid independent employment by the time they graduate from high school. Entrance into this program is by application only.) Twice a week

Directing and Video Production (write scenes, make story boards, film documentaries, commercials, etc.): Saturdays starting Jan. 13

Intro to Disc Jockey (learn about DJ equipment and entertaining a crowd in a special and fun way): Fridays starting Jan. 12

If interested, visit www.pathwayskids.org or email info@pathwayskids.org.

Here we go again! State testing is almost here...

A little background on state testing in NJ:

New Jersey has administered statewide assessments since the 1970s, and over the years, the testing program has evolved. It began as a measure of basic skills, and after 1996, it has assessed the state's academic standards. In 2001, under the federal *No Child Left Behind Act*, every state was required to test students in mathematics and English language arts (ELA) in grades 3 to 8 and grade 11. That mandate is still in effect under the *Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015*.

In 2010, New Jersey adopted new, high-quality standards which changed the expectations in ELA and mathematics to emphasize higher-order thinking skills and not just memorizing information. In May 2016, the New Jersey State Board of Education adopted revisions to the mathematics and ELA standards and renamed all areas of the state's academic standards the New Jersey Student Learning Standards.

In the 2014-15 school year, New Jersey transitioned from its former assessments to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) in mathematics and English language arts. The PARCC assessments more accurately measure the higher-level skills developed under the New Jersey Student Learning Standards and provide parents and educators with meaningful information to improve teaching and learning.

(Source: NJ.gov /education/assessment)

Although students with IEPs or 504s may be afforded modifications and accommodations on these assessments, it is important to prepare your child ahead of time in order to reduce feelings of nervousness.

1. Ensure your child is keeping up with classwork and homework as this is how they are being exposed to the material tested.
2. Make sure your child is getting plenty of rest and eats a good meal before testing.
3. Use relaxation strategies (stretch, breathe deeply, stay calm, etc.)
4. Talk about what the test is like.
5. Go over their accommodations (i.e., extra time, small group, etc.)
6. Be calm yourself and positive.

(Source: www.understood.org)

Things you can tell your child to do during testing...

Students vary the test-taking strategies they use according to the type of test they're taking. Most standardized tests employ multiple-choice questions. Here's a list of test-taking strategies that students use to answer multiple-choice questions:

- **Read the entire question first.** Students read the entire question first to make sure they understand what it's asking. For questions about a reading passage, students read the questions first to guide their reading.
- **Look for key words in the question.** Students identify key words in the question, such as *compare*, *except*, and *author's intent*, that will guide them to choose the correct answer.
- **Read all answer choices before choosing the correct answer.** After students read the question, they stop and think about the answer before reading all the possible answers. Then they eliminate the unlikely answer choices and identify the correct answer.
- **Answer easier questions first.** Students answer the questions they know, skipping the difficult ones, and then they go back and answer the questions they skipped.

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- **Make smart guesses.** When students don't know the answer to a question, they make a smart guess, unless there's a penalty for guessing. To make a smart guess, students eliminate the answer choices they're sure are wrong, think about what they know about the topic, and then pick the best remaining answer choice. The correct answer is often the longest one.
- **Stick with your first answer.** Students shouldn't second-guess themselves; their first answer is probably right. They shouldn't change answers unless they're certain that their first answer was wrong.
- **Pace yourself.** Students budget their time wisely so they'll be able to finish the test. They don't spend too much time on any one question.
- **Check your work carefully.** Students check that they've answered every question, if they finish early.

(Source: <https://www.education.com/reference/article/preparing-standardized-tests/>)

Shared Services Child Study Team

Wharton Borough Schools
973-361-3010

Mine Hill Township School (CAS)
973-366-0590

Rockaway Borough Schools
973-625-8601



The Shared Services Child Study Team has made it a goal to increase communication and Special Education knowledge with parents as well as teachers and administration within the three school districts. As part of this goal, you will now be receiving newsletters from the team three times a year filled with information on special education practices/law, community resources, special needs tips, etc. We hope you find this helpful!

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Get to Know Your CST

Michelle Lawton is a private consulting BCBA for the Wharton and Rockaway Boro districts. She has worked for both districts for over 6 years. She consults and trains special education aides and teachers in both districts as well as supervises student programming.

In addition to being a behavior analyst, Michelle is a certified early childhood and special education teacher. Her graduate degree is from Kean University. Michelle lives in Lake Hopatcong with her hus-



Michelle Lawton, behaviorist, with her husband and three daughters

band, David and their three daughters. In her free time Michelle likes to go to the beach, enjoy her boat on Lake Hopatcong and travel to visit her daughters at college.
