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Having A Great School Year *With Your Special Needs Child*

This free booklet is provided by Deanna Picon, founder of Your Autism Coach LLC, to help support the parents of special needs children.

Your Autism Coach, LLC
Helping Parents Help Themselves

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A decorative header featuring a yellow sticky note with Latin placeholder text, a yellow pencil with a red eraser, and a blue book with a white page showing a sunset scene. The background is a light gray with faint, scattered Latin words like 'dolor', 'Aliquam', 'maury', 'auri', 'ac', 'di', 't', 'm', 'goma', and 'ipsu'.

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A Word From Deanna

Every fall, children begin the school year with a backpack full of new notebooks, pencils, rulers and other school supplies.

But what is in **YOUR** backpack? Where are the tools that **YOU** need to successfully navigate the educational system?

For starters, I'm sure it would contain a lot of parental supplies...running shoes to help you keep up with your endless list of tasks, aspirins for your red tape headaches, a back brace to help you carry extra burdens, and a small stress ball to squeeze when everything gets to be too much.

Parents of children with autism and other special needs have to prepare and work twice as hard as parents with typically developing children. Our responsibilities and challenges can seem never-ending at times.

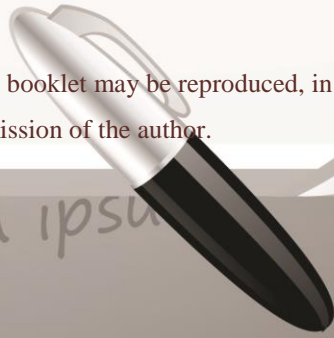
That's why I founded *Your Autism Coach, LLC* and wrote the book "*The Autism Parents' Guide To Reclaiming Your Life*" - to provide support and advice to parents like us.


There is no reason that families affected by a disability cannot have good lives - as good as any other families. And that includes a successful school year for your child, with less stress, more enjoyment and better results for everyone.

This free pamphlet contains my top ten tips to help **YOU** transition to the new school year, along with your child. I hope you keep it in your parental backpack!

Deanna

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A silver and black pen is positioned diagonally at the bottom right of the page.



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#1 - It's okay to feel overwhelmed

Just about every parent of a special needs child ends up feeling stressed-out or frustrated with the special education system at some point. So, don't feel bad - you're in good company!

Whether you're struggling to find the right school or in a constant battle to ensure your child is getting appropriate therapy and services, the challenges never seem to stop. This may be the case for parents starting their child's education or for those who have teenagers and/or young adults and been dealing with this journey for years.

As with any large and complicated organization, you may find bureaucratic barriers in the education system. And navigating them successfully can be a full-time job, (on top of the job you already have), not to mention difficult and aggravating at times.

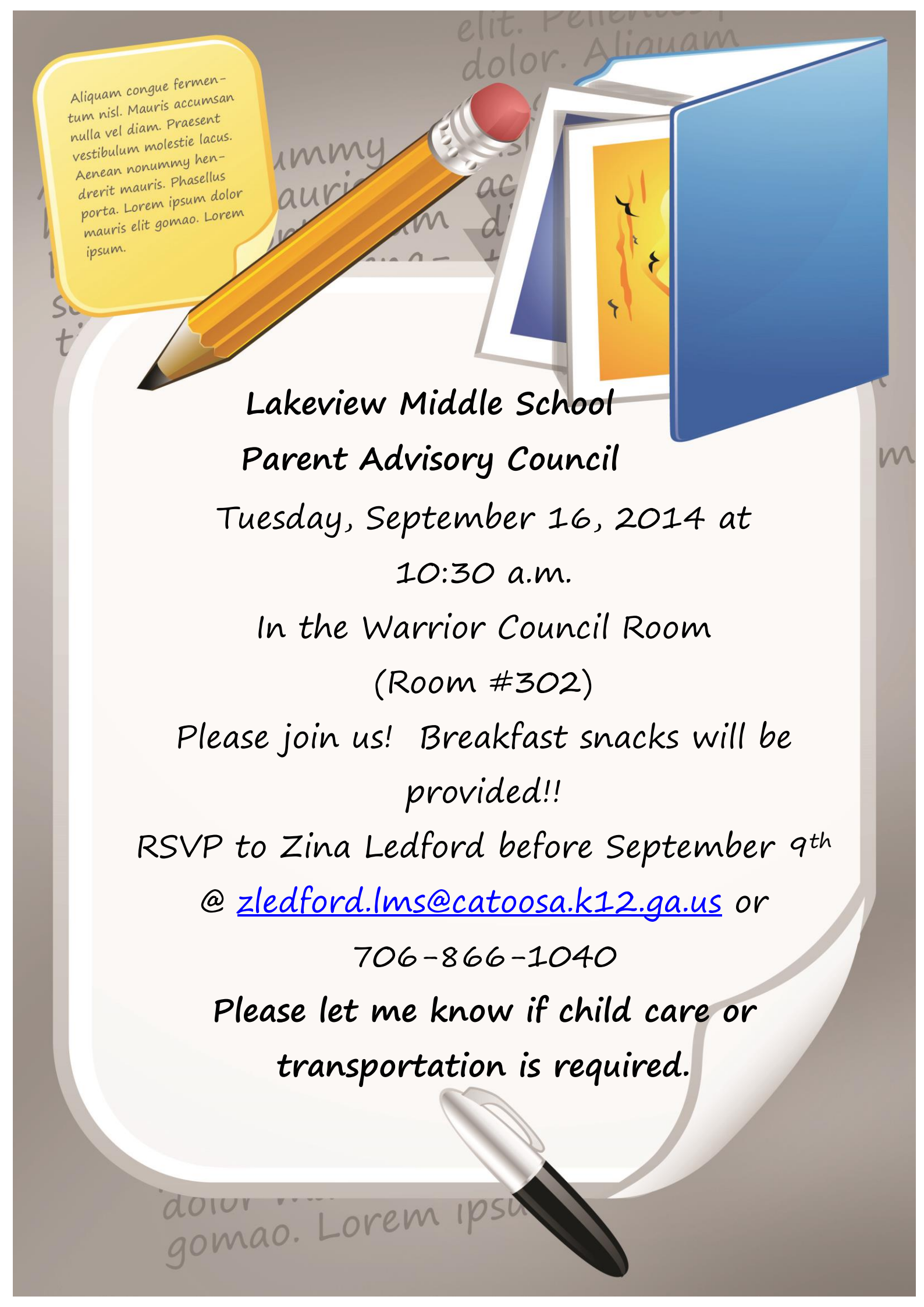
And every year, there's a host of school-related things you have to manage. Bus personnel and student pick up/drop off times change, which can disrupt your own work schedules. After school programs and care for your child have to be arranged to make sure your child is well taken care of. School supplies, uniforms, clothing and shoes have to be purchased.

So cut yourself some slack. You're entitled to feel like you have the weight of the world on your shoulders.

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#2 - *Get involved!*

One of the smartest and most effective things you can do for your child's education is to simply get involved.

Get to know your child's teacher, classroom paraprofessionals and therapists. After all, teachers and classroom staff may actually spend more time with your child than you do!

Teachers and teaching staff can offer advice on appropriate academic activities and lesson plans, based on your child's cognitive ability and personality.

And the teaching staff is an invaluable resource for personal knowledge – what your child likes to eat or drink at school, how he or she interacts with peers, how their social skills are developing, etc.

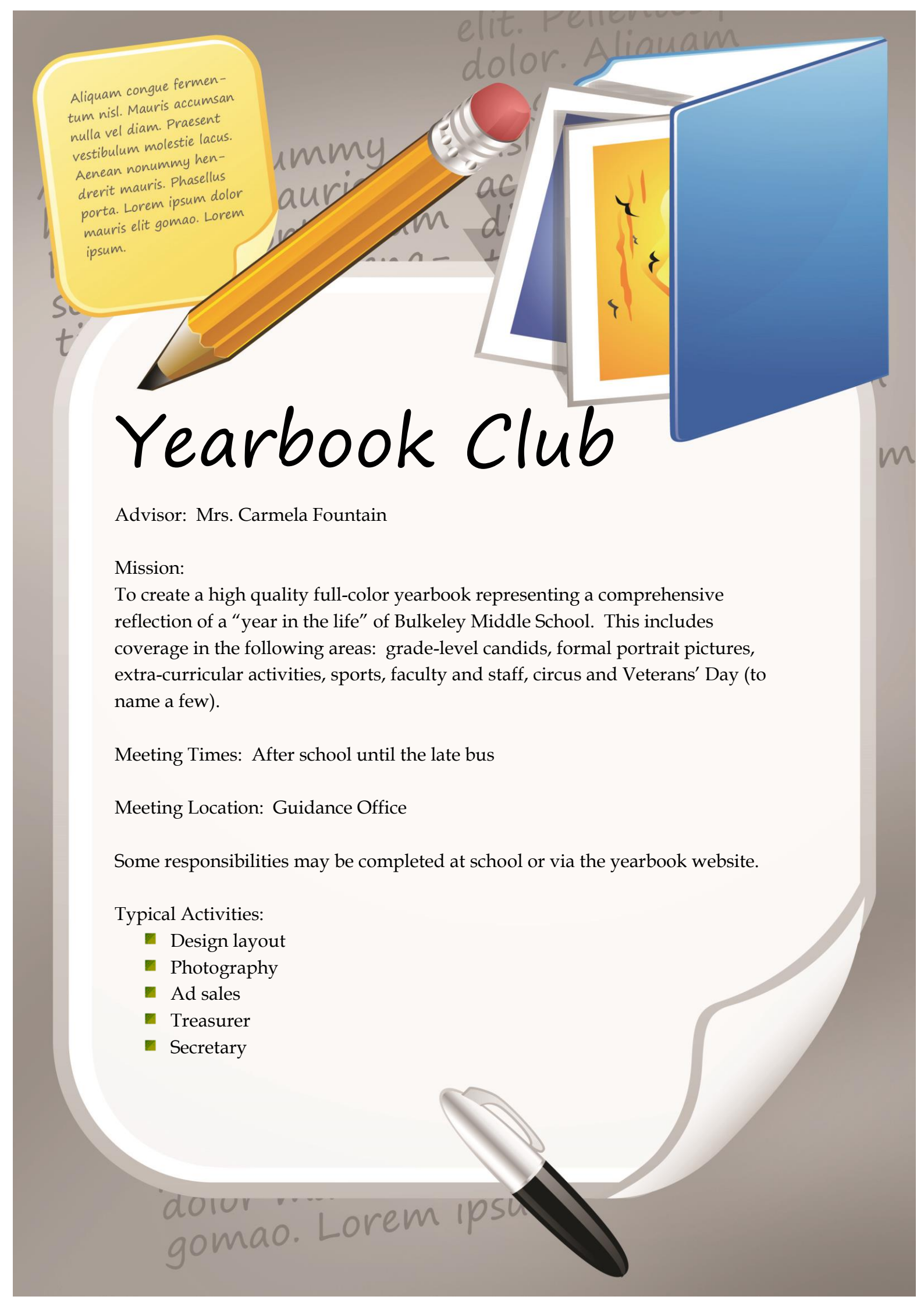
You can also schedule occasional visits to school and observe your child, without him or her knowing you're there. It's very helpful to see your child in a school setting, away from home, among peers and school staff. You might be pleasantly surprised to see a whole different side of your child as s/he interacts with others.

If you possibly can, get involved with some of the school's activities. Network with other parents at school events and learn what they're working on. You can make some new friends and may even find some potential "play dates" for your child. It's a win/win for everyone.

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#3 - Learn from your therapy team

All of your child's therapists can be equally as helpful and valuable to you, regardless of whether they specialize in speech, physical, occupational or behavioral therapy. Each one has something valuable to teach you and can bring a fresh, new perspective, as well as contribute to your child's learning and development.

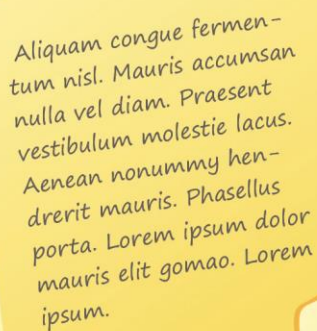
So, take advantage of their expertise and don't be afraid to ask questions. The more you understand what each therapist is doing and how it helps your child, the more you will be able to contribute to their progress. Ask them to help you develop some easy and practical activities that you can do at home that will reinforce their work.

- Physical therapists can suggest exercises that might help your child develop his/her gross motor skills.
- Occupational therapists can give you low-cost, therapeutic exercises that can develop your child's fine motor skills.
- Speech therapists may suggest strategies or communicative devices that can help your child communicate more effectively.
- Behavioral therapists can give you strategies for calming your child down in the midst of a meltdown. They can help you understand, avoid and reduce the triggers that lead to these behaviors.

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#4 - Form a winning partnership

Your child's educators and therapists will be more helpful and involved with you when you come forward as an engaged partner. Tell and show them that you want to work with them.

Be open, honest and approachable with them and they will be the same in return. Discuss best practices for communicating and building a successful partnership. And it's best to form these partnerships early in the school year, while your child and teaching staff are settling in and getting to know each other.

It's extremely helpful if you could provide what I call a "cheat sheet" -- a short list of things about your child and his/her behavior that the teaching staff will find the most helpful. It can be as simple as a piece of paper or index card with your notes about communication skills, likes and dislikes, behavior triggers and all the other little things about your child that only a parent would know.

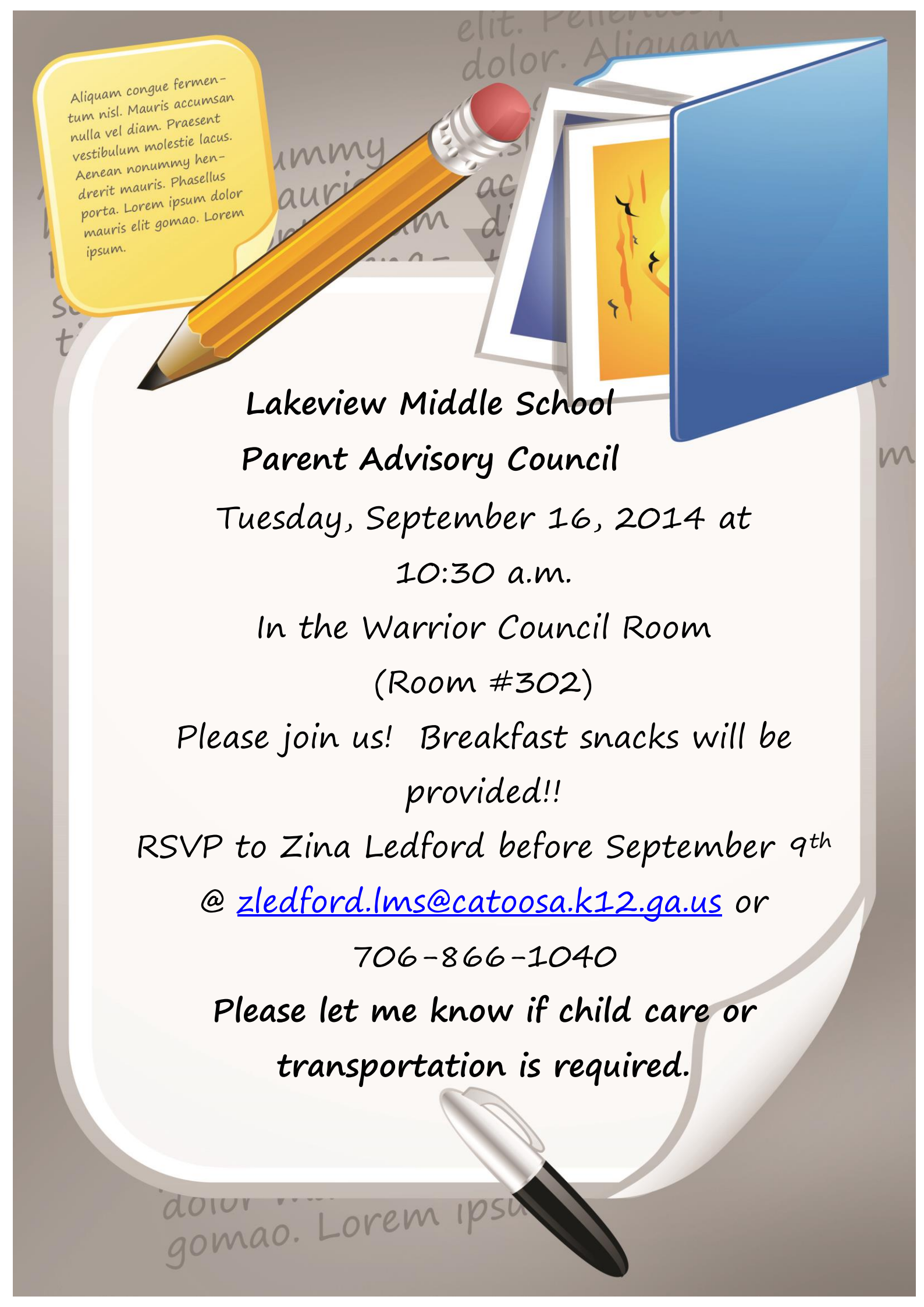
It may not seem like a lot of information to you, but this insight into your child and his/her behavior is priceless for the teaching staff. And, as a way of helping teachers do their jobs, you've opened the door to forming a positive relationship.

And it's always nice to show your appreciation for all their hard work. It doesn't have to be expensive. Send a box of cookies as a snack for the class. Say "thank you" now and again. It really is the thought that counts.

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#5 - Set realistic expectations

It's very important for you and your child's teacher and therapists to set realistic goals together. Otherwise, you're just setting yourselves up for failure and disappointment.

The people working with your child are dedicated professionals, but they're not miracle workers. For example, if your child is non-verbal, it's unrealistic to think s/he is going to start speaking or saying words in just a few weeks of working with a speech therapist. But it is important to develop strategies that may increase your child's understanding and ability to communicate such as using iPad apps or an assistive communication device.

In my book *"The Autism Parents' Guide To Reclaiming Your Life"*, I warn parents about the instinct to go on the "Fix-it Tour" - travelling the world of treatment options in the hopes of a miracle that will "fix" your child.

You can break your heart and empty your bank account on the Fix-it Tour before learning your lesson. In the same way, we have to manage our expectations when it comes to our children's educations. But keep in mind, I didn't say "settle for less", because we all want the best for our kids and should work to ensure that.


By working closely together, you and your child's teaching staff will give your child a chance to be the best person s/he can be. And even if progress is slow, you'll all celebrate the small achievements along the way and the efforts your child is making towards success.

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#6 - Use the little notebook method

It's easy to say that you should keep the lines of communication open between you and your child's teachers and therapists. But how do you do that when everyone involved is so busy?

The simple answer is also the best - an ordinary, dollar store notebook.

This little collection of paper can be a highly effective communications tool if you and your child's educators agree to spend five minutes a day (or less!) to use it.

Every day, your child's teacher should write a brief note summarizing your child's activities. It may not be more than 3 - 5 sentences. Once the teacher has done his/her part, it becomes your turn. You can comment on the day's activities or address any special concerns you may have. There doesn't have to be an agenda. Most teachers just appreciate your interest and input. You should also tell your child's therapists to use the notebook as well.

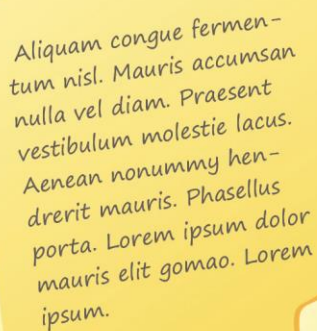
For those of you who prefer not to write in a notebook, there may be other options. Discuss the possibility of communicating via text messages or e-mail. And remember, there's always the phone. Most teachers don't mind speaking with parents during their break.

It does not need to be more complex than this to establish and maintain ongoing communication. Just a few minutes of your time can reap huge benefits throughout the school year.

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#7 - Know your rights

Your child is entitled to a good and appropriate education just as any other in America.

If, for any reason, you are not satisfied with the IEP or other academic goals set for your child or you feel that your child's needs are not being met, you are justified in asking questions and trying to change the situation.

For example, there may be times when you feel that your child's teacher or therapists may not be the best "fit" for your son or daughter. Or there may be students in your child's class who may be harmful to or a bad influence for your child.

In situations like these, you should feel comfortable speaking to the school principal or other administrative personnel to resolve these issues.

Don't wait until there is a problem. Follow your instincts. It's much easier to make changes earlier in the school year than mid-term.

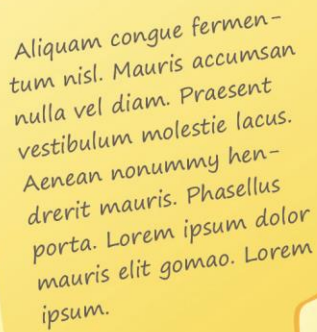
Knowing your rights is not a matter of "taking on" the education system as an enemy.

It's simply another way to be the best possible advocate for your child.

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#8 - A little fun goes a long way

Like any child, yours deserves to be a kid – to have some fun, enjoy the experiences of life and just relax sometimes. And you know what? **YOU** deserve that too.

You don't have to spend every waking moment, analyzing your child's behavior or trying to modify it. They get enough of it in school with constant observation and therapy. Just like you, your child needs a little downtime now and again.

So, have some fun. Play with each other. Take a break from all the therapy and do something silly. Throw pillows at each other while lying on the bed. Do some arts and crafts or finger painting. Blow bubbles and pop them.

Remember, not every activity has to have a purpose or accomplish a goal. Fun is an important part of every child's life.


You can also take your child with you into the community and have a good time. Take a day trip to the zoo, museum or aquarium, or spend a few hours at the movies or neighborhood park. Remember, every experience can create new learning opportunities.

Bottom line: stick out your tongue at your child's disability and **have a good time with your kid!**

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#9 - Acknowledge your feelings

Nobody plans to have a child with special needs. You've been surprised with a very different and more challenging life than you expected.

So, it's only natural that you may feel frustrated, depressed, resentful or lonely at times. The start of the school year is one of those events that can trigger negative feelings, such as wishing that your child could just be "normal".

The most important thing is to understand that getting these feelings now and again is perfectly understandable. It doesn't make you "weak" or "a bad parent" - it just means that you're human.

So, try not to add guilt to your other feelings. You don't deserve it and it doesn't help. In fact, what you really deserve is a medal for hanging in there and facing up to your challenges!

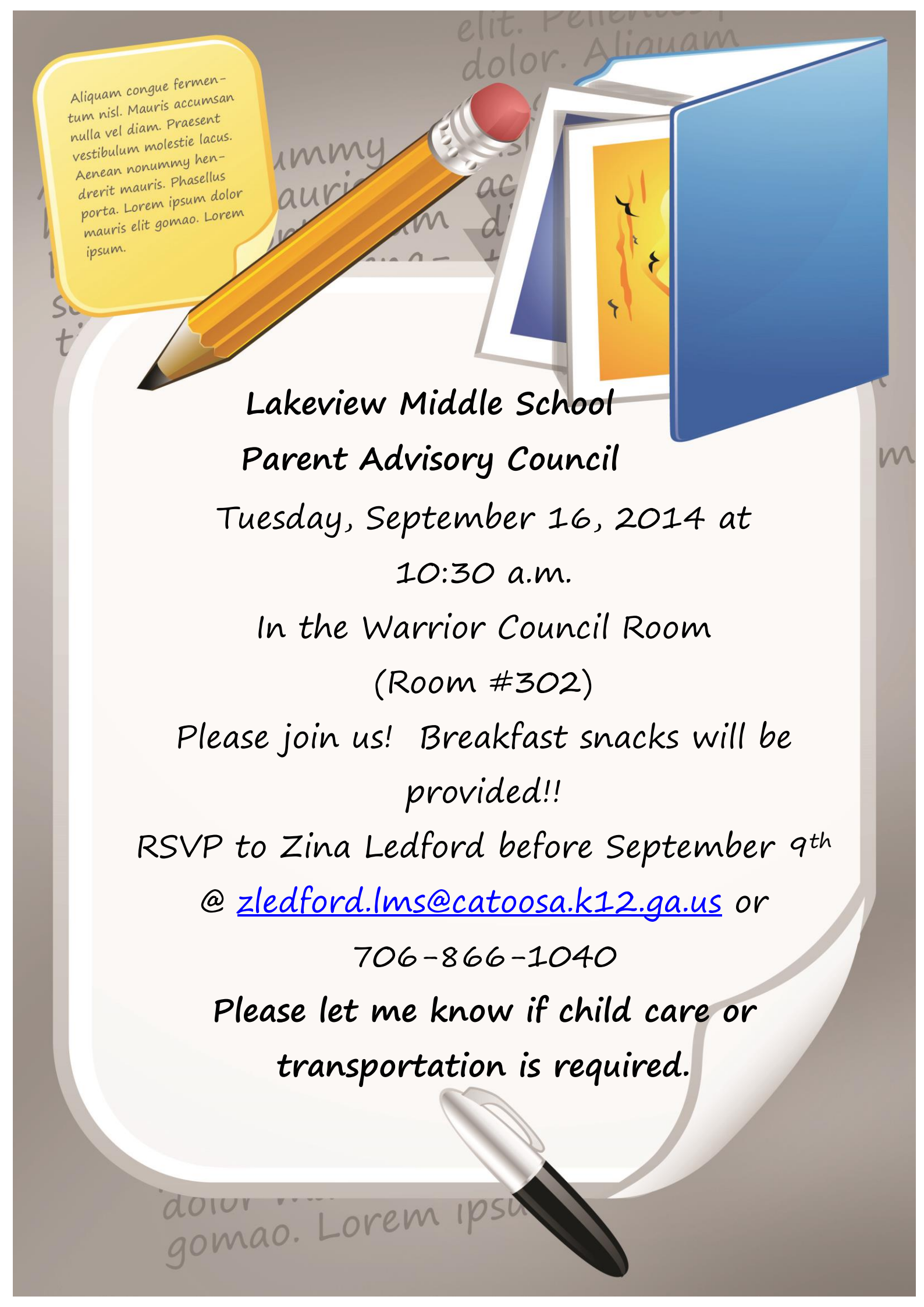
Loving your child and doing your best for him/her makes you a good parent, whether your child has a disability or not. Continuing to do your best in difficult circumstances makes you both a good parent and a good person.

Allow yourself to be human and acknowledge your feelings; they're perfectly normal.

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#10 - Be the head cheerleader

Every child has the potential to be a unique, wonderful person. But that doesn't happen without the ongoing support and encouragement of parental figures.

To get the most out of life, including their educations, children need a team of cheerleaders to urge them to do their best, make them feel proud of their achievements, and help them get over their mistakes or failures. You should be the captain of that cheerleading squad!

Okay, so you probably will never see your son or daughter get a PhD in astrophysics. So what? You probably don't have one either! We all have our limitations.

Instead of concentrating on what may or may not be possible in the future, you will help yourself and your child more by celebrating every little achievement of today. Focus on "the here and now" and give your child plenty of TLC (tender, loving care).

And remember, however difficult you may find your own battle with the disability, your child has to fight their own battles, on a daily basis, without a single break.

It's like watching someone climb a mountain while carrying a piano; every single step forward is a miracle. Cherish those moments and let your child know what a proud parent you are!

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The Special Needs Parents' Report Card

While everyone focuses on your child's grades and progress this year, it's only fitting that we acknowledge the great work you are doing on behalf of your child.

So, I think you deserve a report card, too. As a fellow special needs parent, I think your evaluation would look something like this ...

Subject	Grade	Comments
Patience	A+	Consistently demonstrates remarkable patience with Student and school staff despite ongoing high pressure situations.
Knowledge	A+	Parent has absorbed tremendous amount of knowledge about the special education system in a short time. An impressive achievement!
Leadership	A+	Takes the lead in student support, knows and exercises rights and responsibilities, and makes valuable contributions to the education process.
Communications	A+	Parent keeps school well-informed and elicits open communications with teachers and therapists. Superb, ongoing effort!
Teamwork	A+	Parent has proven to be a full partner in Student's education, consistently exceeding state standards for collaboration and cooperation.
Parenting	A+	An excellent year for Parent, who showed willingness, dedication and true love for Student in helping reach full potential. Very well done!
FINAL GRADE	A+	PASS (WITH FLYING COLORS!)

PRINCIPAL'S COMMENTS: *Congratulations, Parent, on an outstanding year of effort and achievement! Your hard work shows clearly in the results and should be a tremendous source of pride to you. It has been a pleasure working with you this year and I look forward to more mutual success in the years ahead.*



Okay, I read your booklet. Now what?

Get the word out!

If you have found the tips in this free booklet to be helpful, please let your family, friends, teachers, therapists and other professionals know about it! Feel free to e-mail a copy to them, or direct them to www.YourAutismCoach.com for this and other resources.

Get the help you need!

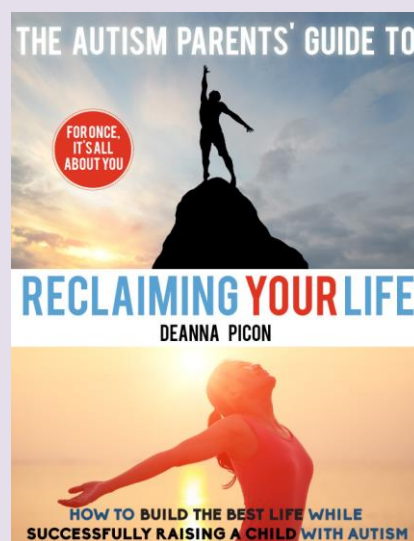
Your Autism Coach, LLC provides comprehensive support programs for parents of special needs children, including individual coaching sessions to address each family's unique challenges and seminars that give parents proven coping strategies and techniques.

Please call or e-mail Deanna Picon to arrange your free, no obligation coaching session.

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Get the whole book and start reclaiming your life!



All of the advice in this booklet was drawn from *The Autism Parents' Guide To Reclaiming Your Life* - the first book of its kind for parents of children with special needs.

This unique book is now available in an affordable soft-cover version for **only \$16.99** (plus applicable shipping fees)! You can order your copy directly from author [Deanna Picon](http://DeannaPicon.com) or through Amazon.com.

No other book directly addresses the challenges facing the parents of special needs children like this **positive, empowering and realistic** guide.

Take the first step to **building a better future** for you and your family. Begin your journey to greater peace, confidence and **control of your life**. It all starts here and now...