

## **SUMMIT ACADEMY AIDS CENTRAL MASSACHUSETTS PARENTS BY OFFERING IMMEDIATE SCHOLARSHIPS FOR PLACEMENT IN UNIQUE SPECIAL-NEEDS SCHOOL**

In an unprecedented move, Summit Academy School for Alternative Learners in Leominster is offering qualified students scholarship assistance for immediate placement. Summit Academy, with its classroom model of 12 students to two certified, highly qualified teachers, is specifically designed for students from age 6 to 15 with Asperger's Syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and other related Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities. The non-profit school, which is pending approval for 766 status, has taken this courageous step so that Central Massachusetts students and their families can begin to reap the benefits of Summit Academy's advanced academic and social curriculum.

"We fully understand the financial constraints that our school districts are facing," explains Summit Academy Leominster School Director Michael Bishop, "and we also sympathize with parents' frustration in placing their children in the right academic and social environments. We believe we offer a solution for all. This represents an incredible investment for us, in terms of these children and the community - but it's one we believe we must make."

While many of the private 766 special education schools have an annual per-student tuition cost ranging from \$45-\$70,000 (plus

transportation) Summit Academy's proven educational model addresses the specific academic and social needs of its student population for less than \$30,000 per year, a tuition which would be among the lowest in Massachusetts for this type of school. Still, the process of getting districts to refer students and realize the benefits of the program takes time-so Summit Academy has made the decision to provide immediate aid to parents who need to enroll their children now.

In September, the Leominster School Committee voted unanimously to approve the school, and Leominster Mayor Dean Mazzarella has said, "The city of Leominster and surrounding communities are very fortunate to have this therapeutic and education program available, with such talented staff, to reach out to students with ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome and other related Non-Verbal Learning Disabilities. Rick Lavoie, internationally-recognized author and education lecturer is an advisor for Summit Academy schools, and led several professional training workshops for Summit Academy staff, including a conference last June at Gordon College in Wenham, Mass that drew 1,000 outside educators and counselors. Mr. Lavoie, a native of Central Massachusetts, said, "There are communities across this country who would give anything to have the type of service that Summit Academy offers for their kids."

Located in the heart of the scenic Doyle Conservation Area, Summit Academy has chosen to locate its first school in Central Massachusetts because parents, community service agencies and organizations have indicated that there is a critical need for high-quality, cost-effective, therapeutic education options. While no institution can meet 100 percent of a community's out-of-district special education needs, Summit Academy's therapeutic model addresses the needs of the students with these conditions. "We are definitely not trying to be everything to everyone,"

explains Debra Beauregard, M.Ed., Director of Special Education at Summit Academy Schools in Massachusetts. "Our mission is to a small percentage of the population with very specific needs."

Although Summit Academy-Leominster opened only last month, some Central Massachusetts school districts have already referred students to the school. Educators, professionals or parents who would like to know more about the program or enroll a student should contact Massachusetts Development Coordinator Beth Foley-Cox, M.A., L.M.F.T., at 978-466-8002.