

# On a CORSE to doing more for special education pupils

By **DIANA SCHOBERG**

The Patriot Ledger

Tracy Johnston thinks her 4-year-old son, who has autistic tendencies, could be almost indistinguishable from his fellow students if he got all the support he needs.

With a tight budget, Scituate school officials say they don't have the money to provide much more than what is required by law, so Johnston and other parents in town established a nonprofit foundation to raise money for enhanced special-education services.

"Schools do their best, but the families need a lot more to help manage their daily lives," she said.

The nonprofit is called the Scituate Community of Resources for Special Education, or CORSE. The grants it awards, to Scituate teach-

## SCITUATE

ers or groups, will be used to expand the services available to special-needs students.

The possibilities include: training to help parents deal with specific issues that may arise; recreational opportunities such as soccer and T-ball in which the participants can feel comfortable learning at their own pace; and after-school social-skills training.

For her son, who goes to school six hours a day at the Early Childhood Center, such extras could mean the difference between always having to attend special-education classes and being in classes with his peers with a just a bit of speech therapy, Johnston said.

"It's the right thing to do for

these kids to give them every chance," she said.

By law, the nonprofit foundation cannot provide money for basic school staffing and services, but its grants could help other students, not just those with special needs, by freeing up money for extra programming elsewhere.

Slightly more than 400 of the Scituate school system's 3,200 students have individual education programs, according to Nancy Verseckes, the system's director of special education.

"To me, it is truly remarkable what one person can do in terms of garnering support when they see an area of need," Verseckes said.

Peggy Dwyer got involved in CORSE for two reasons: she is a kindergarten teacher at the Hatherly Elementary School and she has a special-needs daughter at the Gates School. She usually has a few students a year who are receiving special-education services.

"It's so needed and probably long overdue," she said of the assist CORSE will provide.

Johnston said the nonprofit idea came to her after she attended a meeting where parents did brainstorming about fundraising possibilities.

Marynell Henry, co-chairwoman of the foundation, said: "My experience in the community is that people really do want to support and help our kids, they just need a venue to do it. We're hoping to tap into that compassion and commitment."

The group's first major fundraiser will be a dance gala and auction on May 20 at Scituate Country Club.

A sign-up session will be held at 7 p.m. tomorrow at the Hatherly School.

*Diana Schoberg may be reached*