

## Morton Grove Champion (IL)

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**Program teams middle school, college students**  
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**Project Eye-to-Eye** at Golf School is a consuming passion for learning specialist Bari Levin and it has caught plenty of attention, including an ABC News piece, that ran its second year.

The program, now in its third full year, partners learning disabled middle school students with learning disabled college students after school.

"They're college students who themselves have a learning disability or ADHD and through the art curriculum do projects, discuss their strengths and teach the younger students how to advocate for themselves," Levin said. "The college students try to empower the students and teach them that just because they have a learning disability, doesn't mean they can't be successful."

A study done by researchers at Harvard University has shown **Project Eye-to-Eye** students have an improved attitude toward school, better self-esteem and self-advocacy, improved metacognitive skills and an increased desire to stay in school and attend college, Levin said.

"When I was in junior high and high school, I didn't have the grades I had in college," Loyola student Brian Amado said. "School was hard for me because I didn't have the adaptive tools I needed. Once I got in college I learned to talk to professors about what I needed, I was more assertive, and I got As."

Amado, who is a mentor at Golf School, said it was hard for him to learn those tools and spent much of his school time being angry and feeling lost. "Partly because I didn't have a mentor to guide me," he said. "And that having a learning disability is OK."

Having the label "learning disability" can feel stigmatizing, Amado said. "At the same time there's a sense from other people that what you're experiencing isn't real," he said. "So being able to overcome that stigma and have confidence is the key to becoming successful. You need to see successful college students and realize that you can be one too." **Project Eye-to-Eye**, based in New York, aims to help students with learning disabilities improve their self-esteem. The program at Golf is the first in Illinois and one of a handful in the Midwest.

Amado is co-director of the Northwest chapter. Amado said 80 percent of students with learning disabilities have IQs above 100 (average), but only 2 percent of them go on to college.

"So we're looking to expand the program. This year we're reaching out to New Trier and have some high school students come and mentor as well," he said. "The mentors run the program, but I'm trying to promote how incredible this program is," Levin said. "The kids show up every week after school. I don't make them come." Amado said mentors work with each other and create a bond between themselves and the students while helping them understand their own learning style and getting them to ask questions and be assertive if they're not understanding the material.

"It creates a learning disabled community," he said. "It helps kids see they're their own community and they

can stick up for each other and ask each other questions and self-support."

It not only helps my students, Levin said, it helps the mentors as well. "And for me as an educator, the kids are more open to discuss their learning styles," she said. "I have seen more dialogue between me and my students than in my 23 years of teaching. I'm totally invested in this program."

There will be a fundraiser for the program 5 p.m. to 9 p.m., Sept. 30 at Tommy Nevin's Pub, 1450 Sherman Ave., Evanston. There will be a silent auction and entertainment. For more information visit [www.projecteyetoeye.org](http://www.projecteyetoeye.org)

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