

SEPAC Collaboration Meeting: January 19, 2021

Present: Jennifer O'Leary, Natasha Rivera, Jessica Clark, Karen Heath, Brian Hass, Jeff Ferranti, Chuck Caragianes, Charles Gobron, Mike Barth

Community members: Nancy MacNeil

Jen O'Leary reads introductory message; call to order at 7:07

Rob Rouleau joins later

II. Approve Prior Meeting Minutes (5 min- VR)

Minutes will be approved next time.

III. Budget, Staffing, Program Updates (20 min- IO/ D)

Jen O'Leary: communication about staffing issues so we know whom to contact

Jeff Ferranti: expectation is for special ed teacher to be point person for any inquiries. Sometimes changes happen quickly. Parents should start with them first.

Jen O'Leary: typically parents had access to specialists, so typically were notified of changes. There was a little more proactive communication about when those changes occurred.

Jeff Ferranti: helpful to know specific examples of when that communication doesn't occur.

Natasha Rivera: offers an example

Jen O'Leary: doesn't matter who, but having someone as point person is important.

Jeff Ferranti: additional question from Jess O'Toole about DESE policy for compensatory services because of COVID. The challenge is how service provider can provide compensatory services while still doing regular services. DESE acknowledges some services may need to be done over the summer. Team should have regular meetings with the family.

Jessica Clark: only for kids who have fallen behind, or also for kids not making progress?

Jeff Ferranti: DESE is using it as falling behind, but this should be part of team conversation. Situations are so individual.

Jen O'Leary: what about family who can't fold in extra services now?

Jeff Ferranti: this would be an example for services in summer

Natasha Rivera: has heard some feedback about how families have been engaged about the issue. Some families feel that they have to initiate the question. Should team chairs have reached out to families about this?

Jeff Ferranti: yes. And this can also show up later—what doesn't seem like a significant gap now shows up as bigger later.

Natasha Rivera: We can tell families if they haven't been contacted, they can reach out to team chair.

Jess Clark: Boston Globe article about grant to help districts provide comp services? Have we been able to get any of that grant money?

Jeff Ferranti: not a special ed grant.

Brian Haas: there is talk of money coming through, for general district use.

Jess Clark: will forward the article.

Jeff Ferranti: one other question from Jess – snow day policy. For students who are high need—remote snow day looks like another Wednesday. What if there are specific services for that day? Service needs to be made up in person—this should be the goal. Might need to extend services after school ends in June.

Jen O'Leary: Brian's communication that DESE wants no complete asynchronous days—how does this apply to the new school day policy?

Brian Haas: we would take snow days as a separate entity.

Natasha Rivera: for special ed families—disproportionately burdensome to have another asynchronous day.

Karen Heath: the reality in our house is that snow day is not the same educationally as an in-person day

Jen O'Leary: not just disproportionate, but discriminatory. More like minus one day of school for atypical learners. For typically developing kids, they are not negatively impacted in the same way.

Charles Gobron: Not trying to diss DESE, but first instructions for snow days were that they could be either. He agrees with what everyone is saying. Some of the lack of guidance has been frustrating. He wishes someone had been clearer earlier at the state level.

Jeff Ferranti: Has SEPAC put something together to share with School Committee? Or does he bring something forward?

Jess Clark: if there are a bunch of snow days, it can add up to a lot. Would we just add all that time at the end?

Natasha Rivera: at SC, it was a more general discussion of remote days. It might be worthwhile for SEPAC to provide an official recommendation if there are ongoing conversations.

Brian Haas: we're always reassessing; we're also hoping that DESE puts out something consistent. Our actions met the requirements perfectly well; both general ed and special ed teachers felt okay with this; parents were mixed. This is really just for the next few months, not a settled practice going forward.

Natasha Rivera: hoping for some proactive approach—is there an opportunity to brainstorm that. Trying to take the burden off parents to have to be the ones to reach out.

Jen O'Leary: did DESE say we can't have snow days the way we've always had them?

Brian Haas: That's an option.

Jen O'Leary: given the number of families with IEPs, it makes sense since it's not helping them.

Jeff Ferranti: after snow day, he reached out to teachers/chairs to ask for feedback, didn't get any.

Jen O'Leary: tacking on days at end for IEPs doesn't give students the contact with their peers

Natasha Rivera: worries about the families who just didn't engage.

Jeff Ferranti: what are our next steps? I can share these concerns with the administrative team, support however he can.

Natasha Rivera: maybe a conversation with leadership about what other considerations can be factored in.

Jess Clark: that would be a good starting point; SEPAC could also submit recommendation.

Jen O'Leary: that's always available. Or is this collaboration the avenue of advocating for the issue?

Jeff Ferranti: yes, SEPAC thoughts have been shared here with admin.

Jeff Ferranti: staffing—with Rob R, interviewing for ABA specialist, pre-K para.

IV. Communication: Update and Additional Outreach (20 min- IO/ D)

Jess Clark: this was about updating the website.

Jeff Ferranti: don't know how many families use it. wants it to bring parents to the right place with search terms. Not sure that an email blast is the most useful; very happy to do coffee hours. Maybe by school, or for the district as a whole?

Natasha Rivera: would like community to be able to get to know you more. Maybe monthly newsletter for special ed, instead of email blast? But some additional way for people to understand your approach and engagement. Could get people to get to know you. Communication could link to the website; welcome new staffing. Can highlight programs as well.

Jeff Ferranti: any particular time for coffee hours that we'd prefer, see what works. Separate by school?

Jen O'Leary: probably morning after elementary kids go to school. Not sure about dividing by school.

Chuck Caragianes: transition meetings for HS, had a variety of staff members. Transition from 8th to 9th involves many more questions for special education parents.

Jen O'Leary: also a question about communication subcommittee—do we want that up and running?

Natasha Rivera: we had talked about trying to build efficiencies, connect with district subcommittees. We need to look back at where we left the comm subcommittee question. SEPAC can think about what the mission would be there. Survey subcommittee is one we wanted to keep. The problem of following up with families—frequency, consistency.

Jen O'Leary: also needs assessment.

Natasha Rivera: worries about the families who aren't reaching out just because they are too overwhelmed.

Karen Heath: less time in classroom, teachers may not be noticing as much; parents need to know that they can reach out with their own concerns about progress.

V. Dyslexia Subcommittee and Screening Updates (15 min- D/ P)

Jeff Ferranti: asks if there has been an autism subcommittee.

Natasha Rivera: asks Jess Clark—was there a conversation about SEPAC adding onto literacy subcommittee?

Jess Clark: that's correct.

Natasha Rivera: is there an existing literacy committee that a SEPAC rep can be added to?

Jeff Ferranti: Rob R has put together work at Green Meadow—what we want to teach, how to teach it. Can run the risk of having too many people involved. Believer in control at the building level by the principal, support that.

Rob Rouleau: we have reps from our staff & Fowler's. We're getting together a group of teachers—Masters in reading, cert in special ed, teachers from K-5. Creating a literacy group—looking at programs, doing an audit of what we have, what the needs assessments are. Teachers will gather to meet several

times in the next few months, investigating possible programs, possible PD, curriculum. We welcome Jeff as member of admin team; my job is to guide the teachers, who are the experts in this area.

Jeff Ferranti: Screening updates—last meeting, outlined all the areas. Certain literacy measures—we're using two. We're trying to get some grant funding from state. Looking more closely at [I-station?]. Also Lexia.

Jeff Ferranti: Screening: dial-4 and speed dial [?]. Ms Vasta—wants to more regularly screen kids in pre-K. Speaking with the kindergarten teachers: anyone who was showing signs we've referred. But we want to screen for earlier.

Jess Clark: asks if literacy subcommittee will have no parents on it?

Mike Barth: the initial work is done by teachers and staff to vet, try out different programs—then bring in parents. It's possible we could use parents at earliest phase of audit.

Jess Clark: we have a large group of people who have left district, gone out of district, we could survey them.

Jeff Ferranti: we certainly want that perspective; it's a question of when we bring those groups together. He can talk to Rob and Mike tomorrow about how best to bring in parent input—bring in Jess for that conversation. There's the subcommittee to have the conversation.

Natasha Rivera: when we're implementing any new thing, thorough discovery is important. What is parent experience about what has and hasn't been offered. Plus we're coming from a place where earlier programs were very uncertain for parents. Importance of SEPAC engagement along the way.

Jeff Ferranti: my only concern is that it can't be a discussion only about dyslexia. It needs to be all issues of literacy. He believes that staff is ready to move as a group---very knowledgeable and positive. He knows that Danielle has moved out of district, but they talked together for two hours; if there are other parents it would be good to talk to, he'd be happy to.

Jess Clark: the importance of getting this right so the trajectory works for all kids.

Jeff Ferranti: Rob R is developing the trust of the Green Meadow staff as well.

Jen O'Leary: can we look back at students who were Title 1 at GM who are now at Fowler?

Jess Clark: also kids who were on the cusp of Title 1 but weren't placed there because it was capped.

Natasha Rivera: we'll have a survey ready sooner rather than later—a question about being contacted about this.

Karen Heath: also information/input from parents who have gone out of district or moved.

Jen O'Leary: asks about Jeff's comment about autism students. Jill Greene's philosophy had been that students should have the right to get their education in their own district.

Jeff Ferranti: looking at where district money goes—autism out of district. Some are families who arrived at the district with that placement.

Natasha Rivera: anything with those therapeutic components (Tiger, etc.) we really need, starting at elementary.

Jeff Ferranti: also communication, sensory, social. We need to be sure everyone has that knowledge.

Jen O’Leary: in the past we’ve had a higher than typical % of kids on the spectrum. With Carol, the messaging about those issues and support became different. If we can get back to building that expertise, that would be great.

Jeff Ferranti: if we talk about surveys, we could look into that one too.

Natasha Rivera: from GM, getting PD for staff on de-escalation—when a child is starting to exhibit behavior because they are not supported. Some struggle with some of the gen ed teachers. How gen ed teachers can develop skills for push-ins. Also –the conversation that GM has a higher number of paras—we rely on paras to provide services.

Jeff Ferranti: the BCBAs are in touch with SafetyCare, make sure trainers and trained.

Charles Gobron: helping Rob at GM this year. Very happy with BBST. Has seen some good progress. More is needed.

Jeff Ferranti notes that $\frac{3}{4}$ of our kids out of district are kids on the spectrum.

VI. Remote and Hybrid Learning Update (15 min- D/ P)

Jen O’Leary: asks if there are any other updates or changes.

Natasha Rivera: we should set another meeting. We can report back on snow days, literacy, etc.

Feb. 23 as possible date? 7pm.

Natasha Rivera: does literacy piece also involve written expression, or just reading?

Rob R: goal is to do an audit on ELA. Take a look at what we have, what we don’t. Likes the idea of creating a survey.

Jess Clark: asks which teachers.

Rob Rouleau: representatives K-5. About 9 teachers.

VII. COVID Compensatory Services (15 min- D/ P)

Already covered.

VIII. Snow Day Policy Feedback (10 min- D)

Already covered.

IX. Citizens' Comments (10 min- IO)

Nancy MacNeil: a good idea to send out survey to the whole school population, experience with the curriculum. Advocating has been a struggle. It would be helpful to have parents as part of committee. So many great resources that know a lot. Not just for kids with dyslexia, but better for all kids. The issue of written expression is tied in as well.

Jeff Ferranti: encourage those other parents you know to be in touch.

Natasha Rivera: for literacy issue, add the question of Spanish Immersion. We need to make sure this is part of that discussion.

X. Members' Comments (10 min- IO)

XI. Adjournment via Roll Call

Jen O'Leary adjourns the meeting.

Jeff Ferranti: if anything else comes up, encourages us to be in touch.