

Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) Meeting Minutes

April 21, 2021

ATTENDEES:

Special Services Administration: Jean O'Connell (Director), Allyson Read (Supervisor CBAP, Therapists), Lisa Vitale-Stanzione (Supervisor K-5), Stephanie Orr (Supervisor 6-12)

BT District Administration: Nick Markarian (Superintendent), Russell Lazovick (Principal, Ridge), Karen Hudock (Principal, WAMS), Holly Foley (Principal, OSS), Thomas Thorp (Asst. Principal, Oss), Joanne Hozeny (Principal, MPS), Mike Pepitone (Asst. Principal, MPS), Paul Ciempola (Principal, CHS), Krissy Uhler (Asst. Principal, CHS), Pamela Laurence (Asst. Principal, LCS), Eric Rauschenberger (LCS Guidance)

Board of Education: Robin McKeon, Jennifer White, Lauren Beckman

SEPAC: Jenny Kuhta & Lauren Small (Co-VPs SEPAC), Stacey Irvine (Ridge), Deborah White & Gretchen DiBiasi (WAMS), Lindsay Pannucci (CHS), Somya Bhatnagar & Kim Fusca (MPS)

KEY:

- ★ Special Education Response
- ★ Superintendent Response
- ★ PEC/SEPAC Notes/Reference Links
- ❖ General Discussion/Suggestions

1. GENERAL

→ PEC In District

- ◆ Update on conversations with PEC parents, BOE members and Dr. Lazovick

★ The PEC provided feedback from parents in the community surrounding issues of inclusion, acceptance and awareness for students with special needs in each school. (An informal parent gathering was held on March 19, 2021, via zoom, where parents expressed their concerns and suggestions. PEC leadership made contact following the meeting with RHS principal & Board of Education members.)

❖ General discussion about improving communication between building administrators, PTO and PEC boards. With the shared goals of:

- Providing consistent representation and consideration for special needs students when planning for school events/activities and in the overall school culture.
- Creating more inclusion opportunities in building events, activities and programs for special needs students.
- Ensuring adequate support/accommodations are available for special needs students to successfully participate.
- Enhancing current disability/sensitivity/awareness education & training.
- Further cultivating an environment of awareness, inclusion and acceptance in our schools and greater community.

→ ESY

◆ What are the dates and expanded hours for ESY this summer?

◆ What are the eligibility guidelines?

- Will additional programs such as Resource Room automatically be eligible this summer?
- Will eligibility be on a case-by-case basis?
- Will parents need to request ESY placement/enrollment?
- When will notification and information be sent out?
- Will there be a virtual option?

★ ESY will take place from July 6 to August 5, 2021. The program will run Monday-Thursday except for the first week which will run Tuesday-Friday (due to the July 4th holiday weekend).

○ Elementary

- CBAP: 9 am - 2 pm
- LLD/RR/BD: 9 am - 1 pm

○ WAMS/Ridge

- RR/BD: 8 am - 12 pm
- CBAP/Vocational: 8 am - 2 pm
- No programs running at WAMS, due to work being done on the building, students will attending ESY at Ridge High School

- PALS: 9 am - 11:30 am

- ★ During a typical year, ESY is provided based on regression and recoupment. This year, the district is extending ESY services to a much broader section of students. CST members have been advised to look closely at each student's overall experience during this school year (including social, emotional and academics) for determining eligibility for ESY. Parents are encouraged to contact case managers to discuss any concerns about their student to determine if ESY would be appropriate to address their needs.
- ★ At this time, the district anticipates all ESY programs to be on-site, but have flexibility to provide a virtual component or move to a virtual option, if necessary. (This will depend on guidance from the State.)

→ Progress Reports

- ◆ During the last meeting, we learned that all progress reports would be posted solely online; however, many parents are still receiving them via email. Is there a location on Genesis that they can be found or are certain progress reports that are not online?
- ◆ We have also received notification from a few parents in HS that their student did not receive progress reports (not on Genesis). How should parents escalate if the CMs haven't responded?
- ★ A letter was sent out to parents earlier in the school year, before the first reports were posted, instructing parents in how to access progress reports for their students. The majority of progress reports are available online, through Genesis. However, some CBAP students will have progress reports mailed to them because of specifically individualized goals which are not included on IEP Direct. The district anticipates having IEP Direct goals linked with Genesis in the future. (Information will be provided to parents when this feature is provided.)
- ★ Any parent who did not receive a progress report or is unable to access reports through Genesis should contact their case manager and/or contact Jean O'Connell's office directly.

★ Parent letter about Progress Reports: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ar_D_JJBNGu--je-qeToAa-XXbwwaR1/view?usp=sharing

→ Meetings with Supervisors

- ◆ Pre-pandemic we spoke about having department supervisors hold meetings similar to Allyson's CBAP meetings, where parents can learn more about programs and ask questions. Can we schedule these meetings either in person or via zoom this school year?
- ★ The pandemic derailed providing these meetings during this year. Next year Special Services supervisors have decided to host "Lunch and Learn" meetings for parents to meet with supervisors, CST members, etc. (attempting to schedule one every-other month.) Jean encourages parents to share topics they would like addressed with the PEC Co-Presidents & SEPAC representatives so that the meetings will be relevant and well informed. (These are questions/issues/topics about Special Education programs and services, as well as questions/issues/topics that parents would like to have addressed by case managers, school principals, guidance counselors, OT/Speech therapists, etc.) Whenever possible, the meetings will be recorded, in order to make the information accessible to those parents who are unable to attend in-person.

→ Related Services—Follow Up

- ◆ Have the two additional staff hires begun making up missed therapy services? Have parents received notice? How has roll-out been so far?
- ★ Staff is hired and working with students. Make-up speech therapy services are in progress, parents received notice when the make-ups started. Things were held up a little when schools were forced to go all-remote in recent weeks, but scheduling and sessions have resumed. (A new group of highschool students will receive their notices this week/next week.) Several students will be caught up by the end of the year and others will continue into ESY. Overall progress is good.

→ IDEA

- ◆ As part of the American Rescue Plan there are one-time supplemental IDEA grants to schools this year. Has Bernards Twp received any of these grants? How are you planning to allocate these funds?
- ★ No additional money has been assigned to IDEA yet, it has not been announced yet, so that is still pending.

- ★ There has been money provided through the CARES Act. Those funds have been allocated and the district is working on putting the money to good use. Some of that money will be used toward reading programs in elementary levels this summer, and in addressing social/emotional issues and school refusal.
- ★ Some allocations are still outstanding. The district is still waiting to hear about funding from IDEA as well as Titles II, III, & IV. ESSER Funds have been coming out, as well.
- ★ If there is an allocation from IDEA, there will be consideration for how the money is used. Typically, the district uses the IDEA allocation to pay the out of district tuition costs for special needs students. (Additional IDEA allocations won't necessarily be put to the same purpose.)
- ★ CARES Act: <https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/hr748/BILLS-116hr748enr.pdf>
- ★ Title II: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg20.html>
- ★ Title III: https://www.ada.gov/ada_title_III.htm
- ★ Title IV: <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/title-iv-part-a-statute#Sec%204001>
- ★ ESSER Fund: <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/education-stabilization-fund/elementary-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund/>

→ Virtual

- ◆ Governor Murphy has said virtual will still be an option for students with medical reasons but that the “bar will be high.” While we understand that there is no guidance yet approved from the state, can you let us know any district plans or conversations to support students in September who have cause to remain virtual?

- ★ The district is waiting for guidance from Governor Murphy. The assumption, right now, is that everyone is going to be on-site, except for extreme cases.

→ District Devices

- ◆ What procedures does the district have to clear out student personal information and identifiers on district issued devices—not only chrome books, but speech generating iPads as well?
- ◆ If a student is using a device with information about a previous student (not name/student id, but pictures/videos) should they contact Alex Blinder or someone in Special Services?

- ★ All special education devices use the same iTunes account. Many of the school issued devices remain assigned to the same student through years. On each device, the “photo sharing” option should be turned off. Allyson has alerted staff to make sure each device is checked to make sure they are on the correct settings to ensure student privacy.

2. OSS, LCS, CHS, MPS

→ Resource Room

- ◆ What reading and math curriculums are used for Resource Room?

- ★ Resource room replaces the existing grade level Gen.Ed curriculum and is completely IEP driven. It focuses on the goals and objectives in each student's IEP, each child's deficit areas determine the focus and target of instruction. Reading (within RR) focuses on phonological awareness, phonics, comprehension, fluency and vocabulary. In mathematics, grade-level topics are taught while aligning instruction, assignments and evaluations with IEP goals and objects relevant to the individual students.

- ★ Resource Room has a different structure/methodology than a Gen.Ed. classroom. (More time is taken on direct instruction and guided practice, as well as providing more teacher modeling. As a result, the pace of RR is slower compared to Gen.Ed. classroom.) There is not a standard curriculum because instruction is geared toward improving deficit areas for individual students. However, guided reading books from Gen.Ed., mentor texts, and GoMath are incorporated into instruction, as well as many other supplemental materials and resources. Some

lessons may correspond to Gen.Ed. classes, but the approach to instruction will differ. (Concept reviews, teacher modeling, supplemental materials, time allotted for the lesson, etc.)

3. WAMS

→ In Class Support / In Class Resource / Resource Room

- ◆ As a follow up; during the last meeting we discussed how teachers will work to ensure that “tutorial” opportunities are available for students if the school returns to a full-day schedule. Now that we anticipate a return to full-day taking place on 5/3/2021, can you provide details on how this will look at WAMS?
- ★ Special Services Supervisors connected with RHS and WAMS teachers on April 20, 2021 during a professional development day. Sp.Ed. teachers have been working on plans and coordinating with Gen.Ed. teachers in anticipation of returning to full-day instruction.
- ★ Both Gen.Ed. and Sp.Ed. teachers are looking at the make-up of the week and determining what to do with the extra days. Teachers are not encouraged to speed up the curriculum. They are instead being directed to use the additional time to meet with students and do the reviews that have been taking place during tutorials. Teachers will be able to allot some of the class time to conference 1:1 with students, as they would have in tutorial.
- ★ Teachers discussed how in a typical year they would push-in to or communicate with the Study Skills teachers to address specific issues or areas of focus for students in that placement. With the full-day schedule, teachers expect to reimplement this strategy, as it has been effective in the past.
- ★ Some teachers who do not have morning duty, homeroom or afterschool duty assignments or who have contractual time remaining either before or after school hours, will offer virtual check-ins for students. (Particularly students who remain 100% virtual.) Another possibility (still under discussion) will be to use some of the study-hall time that students will have due to the split lunch period.
- ★ Building and department supervisors have been advised to keep homework requirements manageable for students with the transition to full-days. Parents are encouraged to contact teachers &/or case managers if they observe that the amount of homework assigned to their student is unmanageable or causing undue stress.

4. RHS

→ Similar to above, though specific to Ridge, what happens when teachers’ office hours don’t line up with students’ schedules? Also, these hours don’t currently appear updated online.

- ◆ How will extended test time, etc. be arranged without tutorial time?
- ★ Special Education Supervisors connected with RHS and WAMS teachers on April 20, 2021 during a professional development day. Sp.Ed. teachers have been working on plans and coordinating with Gen.Ed. teachers in anticipation of returning to full-day instruction.
- ★ At Ridge, teachers will shortly be assigned their duty schedules, at which time they will update and publicize their tutorial schedules. As in a typical year, if a student and teacher’s free-time don’t coincide, another teacher who is familiar with the class curriculum can meet with the student instead. Many teachers will be able to assist students to determine when and who they can meet with, and will communicate with the other teacher about the student’s needs. Teachers will also work with students to compare their schedule with the student’s to see if there is a different time where they can meet. (i.e.- If the student has a study hall during the same period that the teacher has a prep period.)
- ★ For at least the first few weeks tutorials will remain virtual, the district is figuring out logistics now. Teacher tutorial times will be updated and posted on the Ridge website as well as on the teachers’ google classrooms.
- ★ Teachers are planning to revise assessments (condensed/abbreviated) with the expectation that students will have sufficient class time to complete their work and reduce the stress of having to arrange times outside of the class period to complete the assessment. Extended time will remain available and can be scheduled by the teacher and student, as needed.

- ★ Building and department supervisors have been advised to keep homework requirements manageable for students with the transition to full-days. Parents are encouraged to contact teachers &/or case managers if they observe that the amount of homework assigned to their student is unmanageable or causing undue stress.
- When will kids in self-contained programs be back out in the community (ie. food shopping)?
- ★ Students have been back at work sites (with parent approval) based on availability at sites that have opened up. The first job placements were in the schools and local community, but more sites are getting prepared to accommodate our students. Students are starting to go out into the community as well.
- Are there plans to bring Friday night social events back?
- ★ They will resume next year.

5. POST-GRADUATES

- Last we heard, the district was waiting on clarification on how the NJ pilot program for a “Bridge Year” can be applied to special education students who are supposed to graduate in 2021 and 2022.
 - ◆ Have you received feedback? Have appropriate families received this information?
- ★ Bridge Year program was approved, parents have applied and been notified if their child was eligible. In addition to Special Services, Ridge guidance counselors have been communicating information to applicable students and families.
- ★ Jean is waiting to hear about new legislation (at the state level) specifically relating to special education students in self-contained programs, about extending programs for students that are 21. It has not passed yet, but if it does it will have a big impact in the district (staffing, placement, etc.) It is assumed that it will be implemented on an individual basis at an IEP meeting. (For students who missed out on work, community-based instruction.) It is Federal Law which mandates a graduation at 21, the state would have to make allowance for programs to extend beyond 21. Information will be communicated to case managers as it becomes available, and from there it will be communicated to parents.

6. FOLLOW UP

- ★ PEC/SEPAC Presidents reporting at Superintendent’s Meeting on April 26, 2021.
- ★ PEC to reach out to building administrators to begin conversations on inclusion and acceptance opportunities.
- ★ PEC to connect with school PTOs to enhance communications and collaboration between the two groups.
- ★ Previous SEPAC meeting minutes & parent representatives: <http://bernardspec.com/about-us/pac/>