

# SEPAC Meeting Minutes

August 26, 2020

Attendees: **\* Special Services Administrators:** Jean O'Connell, Lisa Vitale-Stanzione, Allyson Read, Stephanie Orr  
**\* BT Administrator:** Nick Markarian  
**\* Board of Education:** Jennifer White, Robin Mckean  
**\* PEC/SEPAC:** Jennifer Kuhta, Lauren Small, Deborah White, Somya Bhatnagar, Gretchen DeBiasi, Heidi Green

**\* Special Services Administrators previewed a slideshow with information about what special education programs will look like virtually during the month of September. The slideshow was sent out to parents in letter form later in the day on 8/26.**

→ SEPAC representatives shared feedback from parents collected through conversations and emails from PEC families explaining their concerns, frustrations and issues with virtual learning.

## → VIRTUAL SCHOOL (2020-2021)

- ◆ Students were permitted to attend ESY in-person during this summer, now parents are informed that the (in-person) start of the 2020-2021 school year is being postponed because the district needs to complete work on the air filtration systems and secure additional PPE
  - Were the air filtration systems safe for students/staff during ESY this summer?
    - \* This summer BT schools held on-site ESY using the guidelines the NJ Governor gave for summer camps. On August 13, updated guidelines with new rules and regulations were announced and BT Schools is now not able to safely open for on site/in-person learning during September. The 3 areas prohibiting school from opening in-person are:**
      - **Staffing, Special Education staff have requested leaves**
      - **HVAC system updates**
      - **Supplies, while ordered early, there is a huge backlog on delivery because most school districts in the state ordered the same supplies**
- ◆ Considerations for students in SpEd program placements for the fall 2020
  - Will students in special education placements be able to return to school (in-person), even if general education students aren't allowed? (If staffing issues don't impact this population & there is an adequate amount of PPE for staff/students, etc.)
    - Virtual learning does not meet the needs of all special education students. The development of some students is dependent on in-person instruction and interactions.
    - As with ESY, it would be an opportunity for students to maintain the skills/routines paramount in making progress toward their goals and objectives and help in reducing student regression.
      - \* SS supervisors are not looking at a "one size fits all" approach to bringing students back to school. When it is safe to do so, and school buildings meet guidelines, special education students with most significant needs will be brought back for in-person learning. This decision is not tied to general education decisions. It is understood that our students have unique and considerable needs that are harder to meet virtually.**
  - Can 1:1 Teacher/ Paraprofessional/ Therapist be sent to a student's home?
    - Relating to a screen is extremely challenging for some students and doesn't adequately provide the instruction/environment needed for those students to learn and progress in their goals/objectives.
      - \* The district has sent special education staff to students' homes in the past. Generally this accommodation is made around safety concerns. Please reach out to your teacher, case manager and special services supervisors if your child is struggling academically, socially or behaviorally. Your child's case manager can help develop a plan of action to assist, support, and work with your child and family.**
  - Has the district considered placing students in OOD settings while BT schools are virtual only?
    - Especially those students who have regressed due to school closures, students who have been disruptive/aggressive at home, and students with two working parents
      - \* Placing students out of the district will not be entertained while school is virtual for 17 days. The district does not plan to remain virtual.**
- ◆ How does the district intend to make up for the lack of progress and/or regression of students due to school closures, in preparation for the time when schools return to in-person learning?
  - \* Teachers will be meeting often and communicating with case managers. If a student needs additional assistance, the case manager will speak with the supervisor to determine the best way to support a student. Parents should also reach out to your student's teacher with any concerns relating to virtual or blended learning.**

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- ◆ Will the district be flexible about assignments and absences, while parents are trying to manage work and class time for multiple students?

**\* We understand the strain that this learning environment has placed on families. We want to work with families any way possible to assist in the management of work and school. Reach out to teachers when you are struggling, ask for extensions, explain the situation. Case managers are also a great resource. The goal is to work together as we navigate this new learning environment. We will work with families.**

## → GENESIS FORMS

- ◆ Parents have expressed concerns because the Genesis forms do not allow an option to not release student information and are therefore blocked from accessing student schedules, etc.

**\* Mr. Markarian understands that the question relating to releasing medical information could be written more clearly. Board of Education members will look into adopting different language in future years. The medical information form (which used to be a yellow index card parents filled out on the first day of school) provides information about students' health that the school nurse will keep. It may be shared with a teacher for safety reasons, ie. food allergy. This information will not be used in IEP meetings or as parental agreement for any kind of restraint and seclusion.**

## → FACE MASKS / SAFETY

- ◆ Once school returns to in-person learning, will clear masks be provided for all staff who work with students who have speech and hearing impairments?

**\* Clear masks have been ordered.**

## → BUILDING AND STAFF

- ◆ How many of the district staff who are unable/uncomfortable teaching in-person belong to the special education staff? (Teachers, aides, behaviorists, therapists, etc)

**\* 22 Special Education staff members have requested leaves**

## → VOCATIONAL PROGRAM / POST-GRADUATE STUDENTS

- ◆ What is the district's plan to address incomplete program objectives for students, due to quarantine restrictions?

**\* The district is aware that important job training and placement time has been missed. They are not able to create positions, but will work with businesses, as they open, to place students. Summer can also be used to add time to job training and placement.**

## → IEPs & COMPENSATORY SERVICES

- ◆ What is the plan for making up missed OT/PT/Speech, etc. sessions missed from Spring of 2020?

**\* The district will continue to make up missed sessions in compliance with students' IEPs**

- ◆ What is the plan for accommodating students with OT/PT/Speech, etc. services during virtual learning this September?

**\* The district will provide services virtually until school opens in person. Parents are not able to opt out of virtual services to make up in person when they return to school.**

## → ESY FEEDBACK

- ◆ The drop off/ pick up process was well managed, efficient & safe.
- ◆ The transportation agency was responsive to questions and concerns.
- ◆ In-person ESY confirmation came late and it was difficult for working parents to create plans to drop off/ pick up their students at the last minute.
- ◆ Information about the exception process for wearing masks was unclear in the initial communication from special services. School nurses were not on the same page, which caused confusion for parents.

**\* Jean O'Connell is willing to meet more frequently with SEPAC representatives, to share information and hear parent concerns as we navigate through the upcoming school year.**