



NJ Administrative Code 6A:14-1.2(h) states that:
Each district Board of Education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities.

October 18, 2023

SEPAC Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Janice Corrado, Kristin Fox, Megan Lipset, Robin McKeon, Jean O'Connell, Stephanie Orr, Lindsay Pannucci, Monica Petraglia, Allyson Read, Bridget Schiraldo, Sean Siet, Cara Ottilio-Cooper, Kim Fusca, Erica Fitzpatrick, Jenny Kuhta, Karen Zubulake, Lisa Vitale-Stanzione, Jen White
Meeting minutes denoted in RED

Welcome Back

SEPAC began by recognizing the collaborative efforts of the SEPAC and the administration during the 22-23 school year.

“We want to start by thanking the administration for taking so much of what was discussed at these meetings last year and for providing an individualized and comprehensive *Guide to the Special Education Process* for our special education families on the district website. The *Guide* will provide important information for families with children just beginning the I&RS process through classification and the creation of IEPs with specific details about each step in the process, and we appreciate all of the work and research that went into its development. As promised, the district started this year off with a presentation about Student Support Services -- academic, counseling, and special education -- that are available for all students and families. Our collaboration last year on SEPAC helped to bring both of these to fruition, and we know that all families will benefit from these efforts. We are excited that the *Guide* is now available on the district website and we hope to talk more about how we can help get the word out to families later in the meeting. We look forward to continuing the wonderfully collaborative relationship between the district and the special education families we represent in the year ahead.”

Jean O'Connell then shared some Special Services priorities. Special Services wants to revamp their website – looking for SEPAC input and will be setting aside a day in December to work on it. They welcome our suggestions on the updated Guide to Special Services.

Introductions

- SEPAC Organization Chart
- Brief introductions/Roles

ESY/Back to School

- ESY
 - Communications
 - **Request:** Protocol for teacher and related services welcome letter (due week prior to ESY start date)

- **Request:** Transportation email sent out to coincide with transportation posting in Genesis. Include graphic: “Here’s where to find your bus information”

It was discussed that Jean would instruct ESY teachers to send their welcome letters prior to the end of the school year, in June. Noting the need for better bus instructions, the idea was put forward and agreed upon that the bus instructions would also be included in the June ESY welcome email.

We also spoke about welcome letters from related services at the start of the school year – Jean will instruct those staff members as well as tell principals that all special education teachers are to write their welcome letters in June before they leave so they can be instantly sent when assignments come out at the end of August.

Sean Siet and Jean O’Connell shared that personnel does shift up until the beginning of school in Special Services as they balance caseloads among teachers/support staff. To help this process case managers now report to work 5 days earlier than the rest of the staff.

Jean advises elementary parents to ask the classroom teacher at the Meet the Teacher open house who their related services teachers are so children can meet them as well.

SEPAC suggested the final Friday folder(s) in June remind parents of the staffing assignment timelines and expected flow of information.

- Security Officers
 - Concerns Ridge officer sitting in parked car rather than walking building, doors still unlocked/propped
 - **Request:** Security officers at all ESY schools next summer

Jean will speak to Nick about making sure the role of the ESY officer at RHS is to patrol for elopement, not sit in the car. She’ll also ask him about the possibility of having an officer at ESY school(s) as well. In regard to having ESY at a school with no rec camp so that the doors can be more secure, Jean said it’s up to Nick and she’ll speak with him. Robin McKeon suggested talking to the Town Council about providing officers since the rec camp is run through town. SEPAC asked for a response prior to the April meeting.

- **Back To School Improvements for Next Year: Communication Protocols**

- Parents did not receive timely communication from teachers, case managers, related services providers
 - **Request:** Every staff member who will work with a student should send communication at least a week ahead of time.

Unfortunately the August 28th BOE meeting where some of the new Special Education teachers were approved happened on the same day as the teacher reveals. But it’s purposeful that the August board meeting be as late as possible so the district can approve as many staff as possible. A possible answer would be for Special Services to send out a communication if Special Services has a lot of approvals happening after the posting in Genesis, so at least parents have a heads up.

Elementary teachers are supposed to be posting welcome letters in Genesis/Course Pages but not happening consistently.

We discovered through this discussion that elementary parents are not aware of the Course Pages area of Genesis and the postings there. District will send more information on navigating/using Genesis.

- **Request:** Special Education BTSN meeting times communicated to principals for consistency
- **Request:** Explain the role of SLEOs in the elementary schools. How will they be trained to deal with special education students?

SLEOs were trained to work with the student population, including Special Education students. While this included PMT training, their job does not entail getting involved if there is a physical altercation.

Trend Report:

- Trends discussed:
 - Challenges with transition grade levels (K, 6th, 9th)

Working on improving communication and workload sharing between case managers in transition years on the next professional development day with the goal of improving the IEPs for students in transitional years. Also will add more observations from rising grade case managers, teachers etc. Allyson Read said they did curriculum writing on CBAP transition documents as well.

Special Services got an update to the goal bank (the list of goals in the computer program to choose from) so the goals are more appropriate. Going forward, CBAP 6th orientation will be included at WAMS orientation.

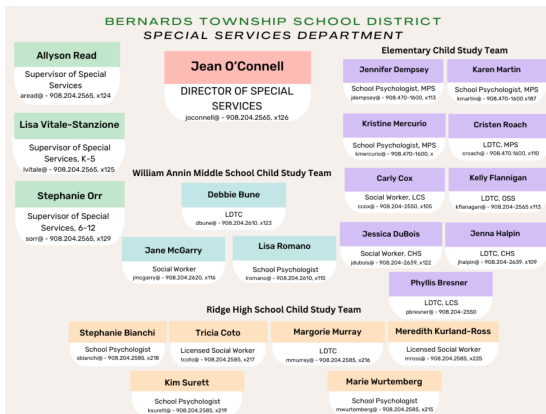
- Integration of CBAP students into gen ed classes
- Resources to help students who are behind due to missed school during pandemic.

District is moving forward with 4-day/week after school tutoring for students receiving instructional support, grade 3-5, even though the grant money from the state has been delayed. Students were invited and parents must opt them in. Had a limited response from teachers able to stay and tutor after school. 26 students out of 82 offered took advantage of the tutoring and district would not be able to support more based on the limited staffing available.

This tutoring is not available to classified students, and Jean urged parents to advocate for more specific IEP goals if their child is behind. District has been using ESY as a way to close the achievement gaps; more students were invited this summer to ESY than ever before.

Special Education Snapshot: Number of students See chart from Special Services

SEPAC asked if it could be broken down by grade level, Jean said she will break it down from last year to this year, as that's a better way to look at growth.



Which program is each supervisor responsible for?

Allyson Read: **all CBAP and preschool**

Lisa Vitale-Stanzione: **K-5 Bridges, RR, ICS/ICR, LLD**

Stephanie Orr: **6-12 Bridges, RR, ICS/ICR & LLD**

Jean O'Connell: **oversees the RHS vocational program**

2023-24 SEPAC Initiatives

In the coming year, SEPAC will be working on projects to enhance communication and collaboration, to provide additional parent training opportunities, and to increase school wide understanding and inclusion of our students in all areas of school life.

Communications Team

Megan Lipset, Kim Fusca, Eric Purdum, Somya Bhatnagar

Goal: Provide clear, accurate, timely information to parents

- BTSN: Goal was to make families aware of both PEC and SEPAC organizations
 - Consistent message delivered by principals at all BTSNs
 - Poster, postcards, name of SEPAC rep at table at all BTSNs
- PEC/SEPAC postcards
 - **Request:** Have ALL teachers distribute postcards at November elementary conferences (mentioned at SuperPAC 10/16) **OK**
 - **Request:** Have Case Managers distribute PEC/SEPAC postcards to new families and at IEP meetings **OK**

Jennifer White suggested SEPAC give a speech at a BOE meeting using poster to make public and board aware of the supports available through PEC and SEPAC

- Project Lifesaver
 - **Request:** Schedule information session with Tracey Baldassare for case managers and CBAP/BRIDGES teachers to learn about new tracking system

This is in the works

- **Request:** Have Case Managers distribute Project Lifesaver brochures to new families and at IEP meetings **OK**
- Collaborate with the district to market services and programs to parents to increase exposure and attendance
- Trying to add more after school programs at RHS for students with aides and use student mentors (Linda Valero in charge).
 - Ex: Clarify Mentor Program Options:
 - Special Education Teacher Mentors

- Social Skills Mentors
- Big/Little Sibling Mentors
- PEC Mentors

SEPAC will set a meeting/send email between Monica, Jean & Stephanie to create a one-sheet on all the mentor programs available, including Unified Sports.

Student Support Services Team

Cara Otilio-Cooper, Janice Corrado, Lindsay Pannucci

Goal: Define and communicate general education and special education services available in district

- Communication
- I&RS/RTI Parent Education Event
 - What are the dates for each school?
 - How will parents be informed about the process?
 - Will *Guide to the Special Education Process* be included?
- *A Guide to the Special Education Process*
 - How will parents learn about this?

Stephanie Orr and Lisa Vitale-Stanzione are providing parents with a presentation of the Intervention & Referral Services in Bernards Twp. on 11/1 for WAMS and 11/29 for all 4 elementary schools at the Oak Street auditorium. Parents will learn about *Guide to the Special Education Process* at these parent presentations as well as through the new special services website.

Disability Awareness Team

Jenny Kuhta and Erica Fitzpatrick

Goal: Educate staff and students about disabilities

- **Request:** Kristin Fox update on summer disability curriculum writing
- Melinda Jennis for this year's sensitivity training? Next year?

District is paying for 23-24 year. Programming, not curriculum. District is looking for ways to roll it into additional grade levels.

- Jenny and Erica to suggest district-wide disability awareness efforts
 - Monthly
 - Should we be working with Kristin Fox, principals, guidance?
 - How do we make this happen?

This year, teachers K-5 are piloting monthly lessons chosen from spreadsheet of lessons given to principals in September. Teachers choose which lesson to do each month throughout the year and then asked to provide feedback to Kristin Fox for summer curriculum writing.

At WAMS, there were three different sensitivity lessons provided last year. WAMS teachers have also had recent training in executive function, and Stephanie has done

observation in classrooms to see if teachers are using these strategies. Stephanie will continue to provide these opportunities again this year.

Nov 15th professional development day the gen ed K-5 teachers, including all special area teachers, are getting executive function training. Those skills would also be rolled into I&RS approaches.

Community Outreach & Transition Team

Karen Zubulake and Bridget Schiraldo

Goal: Communicate opportunities for Vocational and Transition students

- Workshop with Judy and Don Widerkehr *An Awesome Ordinary Life: A Ridge High Graduate Success Story* on November 15th
- Features/Interviews to promote local businesses participating in Work-Based Learning Program
- Increased extracurricular options for WAMS/Ridge students
 - Movie Night Revival
 - Halloween Party -- at YMCA 10/28. 28 kids signed up.
 - Social Skills Club - Laura Gallagher has options available 3 days/week at RHS
 - **Request:** Similar opportunities at WAMS? Looking to add it next year. Difficulty finding staffing for this after school at WAMS at present.
 - **Looking to add respite care some Friday nights.** Talking to staff about who would cover these nights. Grades 9-12 are in the works and then transition kids.

Parent Education Team

Monica Petraglia and Cara Otilio-Cooper

Goal: Create and promote roundtable gatherings, seminars, and webinars on topics of interest for parents

- Parent feedback what they need education on: gen ed always the largest percentage of families wanting to attend the workshops. Anything relating to ADHD; managing escalating behavior and puberty; IEP deep dive
- Workshop Scheduled with Jessica DuBois "Set Your Home Up for Success" 10/26 @ 7 p.m., Cedar Hill Cafeteria

Next SEPAC Meeting: January 17, 2024