

Special Education Parent Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

October 21, 2020

ATTENDEES:

- ❖ School District/Board of Education: Nick Markarian (Superintendent); Robin McKeon & Jennifer White (BoE)
- ❖ Special Services: Jean O'Connell (Director); Lisa Vitale-Stanzione, Stephanie Orr, Allyson Read (Supervisors)
- ❖ SEPAC Parent Representatives: Jenny Kuhta & Lauren Small (PEC Co-Presidents/ SEPAC Coordinators); Somya Bhatnagar, Kim Fusca, & Linnet Pereira (MPS & Pre-K); Anita Maschhoff & Lindsay Pannucci (CHS); Heidi Green (OSS); Gretchen DeBiasi & Deborah White (WAMS); Stacey Irvine & Marisa Taormina (RHS); Jaya George (OOD)

1. OSS, LCS, CHS, MPS

→ Self-Contained

- ◆ Do students in CBAP, and other self-contained programs have access to district reading specialists? How would a parent request this intervention?
- ◆ Is there an option for hybrid BD students to attend virtually for a day, if they have a symptom per the daily attendance form, that prohibits them from attending in-person?
- ★ *Lisa Vitali-Stanzione trains both Reading Specialists and Special Education teachers in methods used for reading support. Reading Specialists work with general education students who are identified as struggling with reading skills, as interventionists for students in Tier 1 (Rtl 3 Tiered Model), to support students to meet general education standards and objectives for reading. Students who have IEPs which include interventions related to reading, would have goals and objectives specific to their needs, which will be managed through special education teachers and staff.*
- ★ *Parents are encouraged to discuss concerns specific to their child with (FIRST) the teacher connected with the area of concern, followed by contacting their Case Manager to determine if modifications to the student's IEP are needed.*
- ★ *The district is providing the option for virtual learning; so students are able to participate in school virtually on days when they are scheduled for in-person instruction, but won't be physically present in the school building. If at all possible, parents should notify teachers in advance of student absences (especially for prolonged absence) when the student will be attending virtually, as this allows staff time for making arrangements to accommodate the change. Students in the BD program have the same opportunity. Virtual instruction for BD students under these circumstances will vary depending on the individual student's schedule. Whenever possible BD students will be included in live instruction sessions, however it will not always be possible to accomplish, in which case the student will be provided the lesson in an alternate format (supplemental education programs/websites, or pre-recorded videos from a teacher). The sooner parents can notify staff of expected absences, the better, giving staff the time necessary to coordinate the student's activities & meetings for their classes.*
- ★ **Tier 1 - Response to Intervention (Rtl):**
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1w1aUJy1bTvbMC4mz21tlvZLnzkdqFJ6O8cAsM4PGKW4/edit?usp=sharing>

→ Differentiated instruction

- ◆ Can teachers label the due date and subject for afternoon lessons in the Seesaw program?
- ◆ Which person in the Child Study Team should parents contact to further differentiate class work instruction, therapy services, etc. so their student's day can be individualized appropriately?
- ◆ Students receiving related services (OT, Speech therapy, etc.) are sometimes scheduled for sessions later in the day, after being on the computer for a significant length of time in the mornings for their meetings, classwork, specials, etc. While it is manageable for some families, it is problematic for other students.
- ◆ Is there a possibility, in subsequent marking periods, to provide these services earlier in the day for students who are experiencing difficulty participating in afternoon sessions? (K-5 students often require parental support to attend virtual schooling. Parents have expressed the perspective that it will be unsustainable for them to be available consistently to assist their children until 3pm, in order to participate in these essential services, when they are scheduled to occur after a full morning of virtual programming that also demands their presence.)

- ★ *SpEd Admins will connect with teachers to determine if they are able to add the date & subject to assignments in SeeSaw. If the GenEd teacher is unable to make this adjustment for some reason, Stephanie Orr will be in contact with SpEd teachers to advise them to share this information with parents. Reach out to your student's teachers to notify them if you have concerns in this area.*
- ★ *Parents should contact FIRST the classroom teacher to discuss current issues. Should it be appropriate to make changes to the student's IEP goals & objectives, accommodations, etc. the Case Manager is the member of the CST parents should contact.*
- ★ *The focus so far has been to ensure students get their Reading, Writing & Math instruction during the morning hours. As such, related services are being scheduled in the afternoon, since there is not often time remaining in the morning without interfering with lunch break. Additionally, therapists are aware that some lessons are best presented when the therapist and students aren't wearing masks. It has been easiest to address this issue in the afternoons when therapists and students work from home and can safely meet with masks. SpEd Admins will explore options; possible rotation schedules? Parents should notify their student's Case Manager if there is an issue with student schedules in order to find a solution moving forward.*

2. WAMS

→ Self Contained Programs

- ◆ Is there a plan to bring self-contained classrooms back to full-day, in-person learning?
 - ◆ When will home program instruction return to in-person meetings?
 - ◆ Is it possible to provide a parent training workshop on the protocols that are implemented when an older student is being aggressive/physical in the classroom (ie: de-escalation techniques, holds, restraining, etc.)?
 - ◆ The chance to connect with Gen.Ed. peers is a critical component to the personal development and progress toward IEP goals/objectives for many students in Sp.Ed. placements. Is a plan being developed to offer inclusion opportunities for children in self-contained programs to have interactions (during lunch, specials, etc.), with general education peers during their school day?
- ★ *Full day, in-person instruction is the goal. For the beginning of this year, the SpEd schedule was based on the district approved plan for returning to in-person learning. Moving forward, full day programs will be discussed, dependent on staff availability and official guidance related to the Covid-19 pandemic.*
 - ★ *Rita Zarabara, RN is working with Special Services to finalize the Covid-19 protocols for families, students & staff in anticipation of returning to in-person home program instruction. (Protocols will require temperature taking, mask wearing, etc.) Staff will need to be confirmed, as well.*
 - ★ *Mr. Markarian will be sending out a survey for parents this Friday (10/23/2020). This will be an opportunity for parents to provide feedback about the school year so far, what is working, areas of concern, suggestions for improvements. Parents will complete 1 survey per student, relaying their perspectives related to the school, grade, program, & placement the child was in for the opening of this school year. The data compiled will work to inform the school district in determining their course of action as the year progresses. The school district is working hard to balance a variety of factors.*
 - ★ *All incidents of restraint are documented, school nurses meet with the student, and parents are informed. Restraint is ALWAYS the LAST point of intervention implemented. Methods of de-escalation and restraint are individualized based on student needs and IEP specifications. Parents are encouraged to contact their child's Case Manager to go over the specific intervention plans designated in their student's IEP, if there is a concern.*
 - ★ *Students with GenEd peer inclusion objectives in their IEPs, who are attending school in-person should be engaged in those opportunities already. (With the exception of objectives that relate to lunch-time interactions.) If parents have concerns that their child's objectives are not being met, they should contact the teachers and Case Manager to discuss.*
 - ★ *District Guidelines on Restraint:*
<https://www.straussesmay.com/seportal/Public/DistrictPolicy.aspx?policyid=5561&search=restraints&id=54fb5ffad2664510b095660b418c6ff5>

★ PMT Associates, Inc.- <http://www.pmtassociates.net>

★ PEC had a Crisis Intervention parent workshop with PMT, scheduled for April 20, 2020, which had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The PEC is in contact with PMT to make arrangements for rescheduling this workshop and/or restructure it into 2 sessions; the first a virtual overview course, followed by an in-person training course, to be scheduled when precautions and restrictions related to Covid-19 are lifted.

→ In Class Support / In Class Resource / Resource Room

- ◆ Can teachers of students with IEPs please add parents as “guardians” in each of the student’s Google Classrooms? (This is apparently an administrator option of Google Classrooms that allows parents to view their child’s classwork and generates a weekly or daily summary of the student’s work, which is emailed to the parent.) Or is there another comparable option for streamlining this information for parents?
- ◆ Is it possible for Sp.Ed. teachers to provide students with an adapted weekly agenda for the class, which might include assignment descriptions, worksheets, and links to the relevant supplemental programs or resources that they can access, or will be using to complete the assignments? Often the agenda is created by the GenEd teacher, which doesn’t always allow consideration for the modifications/ accommodations of the SpEd students in the class.
- ◆ Is there a program that could consolidate class assignments/projects, resource links, etc. in a single hub? Many parents are concerned that students are struggling to stay organized and/or are overwhelmed trying to keep track of the different methods being used, by individual teachers, to post assignments, access supplemental resource programs & accounts, or communicate with students. (Perhaps this could be created by students during the Study Skills/ Academic Support period.)
- ◆ How can students use Advisory Period and Study Skills/Academic Support to their best advantage? Is it possible for small groups to be pulled from Advisory Periods for “training” sessions to learn about the programs being used, in order to improve their skills and increase comfort of using them? (This is of particular concern for current 6th grade students, who did not have the option of attending the Jump-Start transition program to middle school that is typically offered.)
- ◆ Practically, what is the differentiation between In Class Support (ICS) and In Class Resource (ICR)? How can parents be assured that modifications and accommodations are appropriate to their students? (Especially in relation to current 6th graders who were struggling in the Platooning dynamic last school year; there appears to be a correlation between last year’s 5th graders in ICS/RR placements who needed additional support in Social Studies & Science, and current 6th graders who are experiencing difficulty in ICS/ICR classes.)

★ **Many teachers sent out invitations to parents in September, for joining the classrooms with guardian accounts. With the overload of communications at the beginning of the school year, some were likely overlooked. SpEd admins will coordinate with teachers this week to ensure invitations are sent to parents as soon as possible. For additional information about guardian accounts: <https://support.google.com/edu/classroom/answer/6386354>**

★ **The easiest ways to access student assignment information in Google Classrooms is to use the “To Do” tab on the main page of Classroom. Within the To Do list, parents can view what work has been assigned, which assignments are complete and which are missing or late. This feature is also available in each Classroom; select the “Classwork” tab and then the “View my Work” tab.**

★ **Learning plans/ agendas were a GenEd directive, suggested as a way to give weekly overviews for students to reference for their class. Since the modifications/accommodations vary from student to student, it would be too difficult to create an appropriately modified agenda that would suit the needs of all the students involved. Parents are encouraged to contact teachers to discuss specific concerns related to their child in the classroom and contact Case Managers to discuss concerns that are affecting student performance in multiple classes, to determine if adjustments to the IEP are necessary.**

★ **Advisory Period is a school-based directive, all staff members are involved in the implementation. At this point, the schools want all students to participate in the Advisory Period and have advised against scheduling pull-outs during this period. Special Services admins will look into the possibility of using Advisory Period to work with SpEd students in the future.**

★ **Students in ICS are expected to meet the standards and objectives of the GenEd curriculum in that subject, with support through modifications & accommodations identified in the IEP and observation & interventions by a SpEd teacher. The curriculum in ICR classes is replaced with a modified curriculum, with adapted standards and objectives; students are also supported by IEP & SpEd teachers. Special services admins suggest reviewing student IEPs and discussing modifications and accommodations appropriate to the student’s needs with the Case Manager.**

★ **Google Classroom Tutorials:**

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hoaFOQf_FObggChAy-PXvaRDnF3RPBHdhRfyXysXKpgg/edit

3. **RHS**

→ **Functional / LLD Program**

- ◆ Will students be able to go into the community for the job-training component of this program? Students can't lose a year of practice/experience in developing these life-skills. What is the plan/timeline for addressing this?
- ◆ Has the district been in contact with traditional placement venues (library, ymca, etc)?
- ◆ Can class time be used to teach (better) technology skills (data entry, email communication, financial programs like quickbooks, etc)? These would be marketable skills that students can learn while still maintaining social distancing.
- ◆ Would the district work with independent transition providers like Spectrum Works, Future factory or Green Vision? (At least while restrictions are in place due to Covid-19?)

★ ***Special Services admins are moving forward with planning for on-site job training. The roll out has been based on age (post-graduates are the first group being assigned). Placement sites are being confirmed, but there have been a number of factors which have slowed down this process (some locations cannot accommodate our students at this time due to Covid-19 restrictions, some students can't tolerate wearing masks which would preclude them from assignment in particular locations, coordinating transportation, protocols for individual sites, etc.) The YMCA has been willing to work with us under the current constraints, the BT Library cannot at this time. The district is working to develop new relationships with local businesses and establish protocols that suit both the student and the site requirements.***

★ ***There are 2 district coordinators that work with local businesses and companies to develop relationships that would foster participation with training our students. Parents are encouraged to contact Special Services if they know of any local companies or businesses that would be interested in participating in the job training program.***

★ ***Students should be working with Quickbooks, or similar software at this point, if they are not going out to sites. Admins are discussing adding more computer programs & data input skill training into the program curriculum.***

→ **General Education Placements**

- ◆ Many students with IEPs and 504s have been using the private chat features during the full-virtual weeks to communicate accommodation needs (such as extended time, or need for a break). Since the return to in-person learning, many teachers use the screen-sharing feature to project lessons onto the classroom whiteboards. Now if a virtual student sends a private chat to a teacher, it is projected onto the whiteboard for every in-person student to see and is therefore, no longer private. This presents a challenge for students who were relying on this feature to communicate sensitive or personal information, related to their disabilities or accommodations, to their teachers in a confidential manner.
- ◆ Are there any other means for a virtual student to communicate, in real-time, with a teacher during class that will maintain student privacy? In the meantime, is there any way for teachers to temporarily disable private chat features while they are screen-sharing?
- ◆ In order to prevent this situation, while a solution is being determined, what is the best way to make teachers, students and parents aware of this issue?

★ ***One option for students in GenEd classes with a SpEd teacher is to send a private chat message to the SpEd teacher rather than the GenEd teacher if they are projecting their screen on the white board, or vice-versa. Another option is to discuss with teachers a subtle signal that the student could display, which would inform teachers they need to speak privately. Teachers are also being provided (in the next week or two) an additional monitor. They will be able to have their zoom/chat screen separate from the desktop screen that is shared with the classroom. Teacher coaches are working with staff to train them in this process.***

★ ***Parents of students with 504 Plans should reach out to their guidance counselor to develop strategies that allow the student to notify their teacher of their need to communicate privately.***

4. General

→ Virtual School

- ◆ How prepared are the SpEd programs within the district to pivot into 100% virtual learning, if mandated to close buildings due to Covid-19?

★ *Schools are far better prepared to transition to all-virtual instruction now than last spring.*

→ Staffing

- ◆ How many vacancies are there currently in the district for SpEd positions? What is the breakdown?
- ◆ If a Self-Contained classroom teacher is absent, is a substitute teacher brought in so instruction can continue?

★ *Allison Read is currently interviewing and hiring new staff. The gap is closing, with new hires, staff returning from leave, etc.*

★ *Aides are substitute certified, they are trained to take over when the teacher is absent.*

→ Eligibility for Services / Triennial Evaluations

- ◆ What is the status of catching up on evaluations that were postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions?
- ◆ Can evaluations be administered virtually, or is it required that they're performed in-person?

★ *Making progress. Evaluations that were postponed due to Covid-19 restrictions are the first priority of making up. Evaluations are being addressed across the district rather than by individual schools, and ordered based on the dates evaluations were due. RHS has the largest number of evaluations to perform because it also includes Transition Evaluations for graduating students.*

★ *Evaluations must be done in-person. Meetings are being scheduled virtually.*

→ Related Services

- ◆ Is the district on track to make up the therapy services missed since school went virtual? What is the plan and timeline to accomplish this?

★ *All sessions will be made up, even if it leads into the summer or next school year.*

→ Learning Pathways

- ◆ Is there a plan/timeline for installing the Sensory Pathways in OSS and LCS?

★ *The money for Sensory Pathways remains in the budget and is allocated for this purpose even though they have not yet been installed due to schools closing because of Covid-19 pandemic. When circumstances normalize they'll be installed at MPS & CHS.*

→ ANNOUNCEMENTS

★ *Special Services is hosting a virtual parent workshop on Tuesday, October 27, 2020. The meeting will take place on Zoom, from 7pm to 8pm. "Child Study Team - Social Emotional Learning: The Social-Emotional-Academic Balance"*

FLYER: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lqrbt-lhFwDr-ffPxP6dFAX6gUxhw_DI/view?usp=sharing

- THIS PRESENTATION WILL BE RESCHEDULED. AN UPDATED ANNOUNCEMENT WILL BE DISTRIBUTED THROUGH THE SPECIAL SERVICES FRIDAY FOLDER, PEC WEBSITE, WEEKLY EBLAST & POSTED TO THE PEC FACEBOOK PAGE.

★ The PEC is currently running a fundraiser, selling face mask lanyards. For additional information please view the flyer: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Xsj8wn6MDpz0dOZOE718khRa8OuuzAyG/view?usp=sharing>

★ *The Special Education Parent Advisory Committee (SEPAC) still needs a parent representative from Liberty Corner School.* If you are interested in becoming a member of this group, please email BernardsSEPAC@gmail.com.