



SEPAC

Special Education Parent Advisory Committee

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.

January 18th SEPAC Meeting Minutes

Meeting Attendees: Somya Bhatnagar, Janice Corrado, Csilla Csipak, Kristin Fox, Megan Lipset, Nick Markarian, Robin McKeon, Lisa McNey, Jean O'Connell, Stephanie Orr, Lindsay Pannucci, Monica Petraglia, Tim Salmon, Bridget Schiraldo, Lauren Small, Lisa Stanzione-Vitale, Jennifer White, Karen Zubulake

Special Education Enrollment:

- Acknowledge 141 new SE students in the district since July 2022
 - 29 Moving in
 - 41 Early Intervention
 - 37 RTI
 - 34 Parent Referrals
- Growth is not occurring only in Bernards Township; all districts have been impacted as a result of the pandemic and inability to provide/access Early Intervention and other services.
- Self-contained Preschool through Grade 2 programs are the most challenging as they require dedicated classroom space in addition to a trained teacher and aides.
- District is preparing projections for three options: a typical year's enrollment; an increased enrollment similar to summer 2022; and a "worst-case" enrollment of even more students.

Staffing:

- Please address the district's efforts to attract and retain special education staff.
 - Lisa Stanzione-Vitale has been encouraging Tomorrow's Teachers interns to apply for ESY aide positions
 - Stephanie Orr noted that two RHS graduates came back to work in the district
- The Negotiations Committee addressed the contracts of CBAP teachers and aides separately last year, and determined that the following changes would better attract and retain staff for these positions:
 - Increase in salary
 - District reimbursement for expenses related to education/training/certification
 - Schedule change to accommodate an additional 30-minute period before school for customized training

- These additional benefits seem to be attracting aides from close-proximity districts which has helped with hiring
 - Nick Markarian pointed out that the Board of Education has been very open-minded in helping to find solutions to the challenges of hiring special education aides post-pandemic
- Aside from maternity leaves, has the district identified the factors behind staff resigning mid-year?
 - Exit interviews have indicated that staff resignations occur for two major reasons: (1) an offer for a job closer to home; (2) aides are offered teaching positions in other districts.
- Explain how new teachers and aides are being supported in the classroom setting. What steps are being put in place to alleviate or resolve problems these new teachers may be having?
 - Jean O'Connell and Allyson Read are in the process of hiring additional behaviorists for the CBAP program who will assist with training aides on the various teaching models in the CBAP program, along with instruction on student's individualized programs.
 - The District is developing virtual trainings which staff can attend at any time. Certain training tapes will also be viewed with behaviorists and administrators as a collaborative training model.
- Nursing and Transportation staffing: Jean O'Connell has been working with Nursing Coordinator Rita Zarabara and Transportation Coordinator Janet Lubaszka to provide nurses and bus drivers. As of right now, the district is staffed sufficiently in both areas. District has been working with families to review medical needs and make adjustments

Communication & Collaboration Task Force

(Megan Lipset, Monica Petraglia, Jean O'Connell, Nick Markarian)

- PEC Special Education Parent Feedback Forms
 - Vehicle for parents to voice special education concerns in the district via Special Services Friday Folder, PEC Weekly Newsletter and www.BernardsPEC.com/parent-feedback
 - Lindsay Pannucci noted that the forms are designed to ensure confidentiality while helping to identify trends. Helps building principals to be aware of any issues that arise within a given school so they can be addressed quickly whenever possible
- **SEPEC Trend Report (11/2022 - 1/2023):**
Safety of Self Contained Classroom Staff and Students
 - CBAP staffing shortages contributing to unsafe environment for staff and students
 - Two of the district's case managers are trainers in PMT de-escalation; they are training staff to assist in classroom situations

- PEC is in the process of scheduling a similar training in March for parents to reinforce de-escalation strategies at home
- Megan Lipset suggested that verbal de-escalation training be provided to general education classroom teachers
- Dismissal procedures
 - MPS, OSS, RHS received comments
 - PALS/CBAP students safety concern in congested areas
 - Lindsay reported that principals have been very responsive to safety concerns at each school but that some adjustments may be necessary which PEC reps can address with principals as needed
- ESY security officer request at RHS
 - Nick Markarian said this is being worked on with Director of School Safety and Security Hank Werner
- Megan Lipset noted that as new extracurricular clubs are formed, accessibility for students with IEPs should be taken into consideration. In addition, clubs that currently have different faculty advisors than had been the case pre-pandemic should consult with special education teachers and case managers to ensure that clubs are inclusive of special education students

Parent Education Task Force

(Lindsay Pannucci, Bridget Schiraldo, Lisa Vitale-Stanzione, Allyson Read)

- Feedback from parent surveys:
 - What topics are you interested in learning more about through parent workshops and/or lunch & learns? (Choose all that apply). Greatest percentage responded with these topics:
 1. ADD/ADHD
 2. IEP/504
 3. Special Education Rights
- Upcoming Parent Education
 - Parent Physical De-escalation Techniques: Contracted with Handle with Care
 - Looking at March 2023
 - Parent Verbal De-escalation Techniques: Jessica DuBois
 - Looking to schedule immediately
 - Special Services agreed to have Jessica work with PEC to develop and present possible four-session training
 - ADHD and Executive Functioning: Jackie Waldman Coaching
 - Virtual presentation March 21st 7-8pm
 - To be included in SOS and/or District Friday Folder
 - Mother's Day themed presentation: Christine Soto
 - Caring for Yourself as the Caretaker, 4/30/23

- Parent presentation on general education interventions vs special education services available in the district: Kristin Fox and Jean O'Connell
- Transition Options: A Night of Information Exploring Local DDD Services (took place Jan 12th)
- SEPAC Academy will be featured on PEC website to provide recordings of all PEC Parent Workshops

Community Outreach Task Force

(Karen Zubulake, Lindsay Pannucci, Jean O'Connell, Stephanie Orr)

- Vocational/Transitional Job Sampling Business Stickers
 - Students voted on and selected design for sign to be displayed in participating businesses. PEC is printing these currently



- Social Media Campaign being launched to promote businesses that are supporting work-based learning program
- Post Grad/PEC collaborating on Transition Fair March 14th, 6:00 to 8:00 p.m., and Job Fair in Fall 2023
- Post-Transition Database
 - Transition Coordinator Ben Donaghy starting with this year's program graduates. Data to be collected as follows:

Student	Year Graduated	Tracking Data
		Tier level of DDD
		In district vs Out of district
		Support Coordinator
		Adult Day Program
		Extracurricular Activities
		Supported Employment

		Secondary Education
--	--	---------------------

- PEC & Harmony Pediatric Therapy offering Social Skills Group beginning end of January
 - 8 week private, personalized program for Basking Ridge children
 - Includes one-hour parent intake session to customize therapy
 - Program will be included in Special Services Friday Folder

Curriculum & Inclusion Task Force

(Lauren Small, Lisa McNey, Jean O'Connell, Kristin Fox)

- Sensitivity Training
 - Funds for 2022-23 training already earmarked from fundraising
 - If Pathways continues - district funding requested
 - If/When Pathways retires - we need to infuse into district curriculum
 - Smaller meeting requested with Kristin Fox and Jean O'Connell to plan for this transition; initial decision as to which department will take this on
 - Kristin and Jean to schedule meeting with Lisa and Lauren regarding next steps
 - 3rd grade to be scheduled February/March 2023
 - All BOE members, Kristin Fox, Stephanie Smith, and guidance counselors will be invited to attend Melinda's trainings
 - 6th grade scheduling Spring 2023
 - Possible 4th & 5th grade Sensitivity Training this year?
 - Makeup for lost years during COVID
 - Address increasing HIB incidents
 - Funding?
 - Lisa and Lauren met with Jean; Jean and Kristin will work collaboratively to infuse disability awareness into district curriculum with input from special education teachers
 - Kristin Fox reported a summer project of surveying books and other media used both in curriculum and available in media centers. These will be evaluated through the lens of diversity, including disability topics. Kristin has been adding existing resources to a spreadsheet to help evaluate what topics may need to be supplemented

Additional Topics

US2 DEI Report:

- How will the district be following up regarding report recommendations?

- How can special education parents, teachers and students best articulate their equity challenges at the BT Connect meeting? How will breakout groups be arranged?
- What will the role be of special education parents as stakeholders in district decisions moving forward?
- Nick Markarian pointed out that the purpose of the BT Connect sessions are for the district to hear community input that will help guide the Board in decision-making. It's important to balance the challenges, district resources, and time commitment involved when considering possible initiatives
- Tim Salmon said that the Board welcomes input regarding recommendations for the February 13th session
 - Somya Bhatnagar suggested that a more intimate setting for breakout sessions might be better for special education parents to feel more comfortable in honestly sharing their suggestions
 - SEPAC will submit suggestions from special education to Nick Markarian by February 1st

Final SEPAC Meeting for the 2022-2023 year is scheduled for Wednesday, April 12, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.