

# SE PAC Minutes

April 13, 2022

## ❖ ATTENDEES:

BT District Administrators: Nick Markarian (Superintendent); Board of Education: Robin Mckeon, Jennifer White; Special Services Administrators: Jean O'Connell (Director), Stephanie Orr (Supervisor- SE gr. 9-12), Lisa Vitale-Stanzione (Supervisor- SE gr. K-8) Allyson Read (Supervisor, Preschool, CBAP); PEC: Somya Bhatnagar, Lauren Small (Co-Presidents); SEPAC: Meg Findlay(PreK), Kim Fusca (MPS), Janice Corrado & Gretchen DeBiasi (WAMS), Lisa McNey & Stacey Irvine (Ridge), Marisa Taormina (Postgrad)

KEY: ★ Special Services Responses

## 1. Special Services(SS) Friday Folder

★ SS shared that they have revamped the Special Services Friday folder so that it will be a better tool to get information to parents.

★ Friday Folder will be sent at least every two weeks unless there is important information in between.

★ The Friday Folder will provide links to Lunch & Learn presentations, upcoming events, workshops, and will feature information pertaining to the district's Job Sampling program. The links to recorded and archived presentations will be included in Friday Folder so that parents can watch them at their convenience.

★ Special Services will also include interesting research articles for parents to read and review.

★ An upcoming Friday Folder will include details for purchasing Prom bids. Parents of juniors and seniors should be on the lookout.

## 2. Special Projects

★ OSS Pilot Program - To address executive functioning and social-emotional learning needs, Allyson Read is working with staff at OSS using Newmark's Building Bridges program for both Special Education and General Education teachers. The department recognizes that not only students but teachers are also experiencing increased anxiety, and it is important to address this with staff before asking them to address it with students. This initiative will be piloted in OSS ICS and RR classrooms, and then will be rolled out at other elementary schools if it is effective. This project is being funded through a grant.

★ WAMS Executive Functioning Pilot - Stephanie Orr is working with WAMS on an Executive Functioning pilot program, which has also been funded by a grant. This targets a selection of staff across the building through monthly professional development. Teachers can implement strategies they learn in classes. Students also receive help during afternoon homework club. These strategies will be turnkeyed so that eventually more staff are trained in them.

### 3. Curriculum Development

- ★ Over the summer Special Services will work on curriculum development.
  - ★ In High School, attention will be given to providing additional electives, starting with high school-level courses and moving down by grade level to Middle School. Teachers will break down the general education curriculum so special education students can be successful and have more, and more appropriate, options in elective selection.
  - ★ In PALS, the department will revise curriculum and practices for the three full CBAP classrooms (up from 1), and which will articulate integration of new procedures that will flow better for larger numbers. These efforts will involve support staff including OTs, PTs, SLPs, etc. so that all staff members are operating under the same protocol.
  - ★ K-5 will use this summer to analyze available writing programs. Lisa Vitale Stanzione and the curriculum team will look at the top three programs to select the most appropriate and then train teachers in the program.
  - ★ Lisa will also modify 3-5 assessments and projects in the area of science and social studies, starting with Grade 5 and working backwards. This will benefit ELL, struggling learners and Special Education students. General Education teachers will have access and can differentiate and modify further.

### 4. Overview/Q&A regarding 2022-2023 special education budget

- What changes are forthcoming?
- What are the reasons for the changes?
- How to communicate this information to all affected parents?

★ Mr. Markarian provided a detailed explanation of the process involved in budgeting for Special Education programs. The projected budget which showed a decrease of \$750,000 is not an accurate depiction of the special services budget for next year. The projected budget is calculated based on current out of district students. This is due to how it is inputted in the district software. Only the tuition and transportation costs for current out of district placements (which does not include students who will graduate) is calculated.

Our district communicates with County Early Intervention Program, regarding incoming students. The district anticipates that there will always be an increase in pre-school enrollment. The cost projections from these numbers are taken into account and the district creates a plan to fund in anticipation of reimbursement from State extraordinary aid. Reserves in budget provide flexibility. The district strives to be good stewards of resources while meeting the needs of the students.

With regard to staffing, needs are assessed in late Spring reflecting student placements and numbers, based on reviews of IEP meetings conducted with teachers, case managers, Special Education supervisors, and the Director. For example, the district may not offer ICS in every building if there are not sufficient numbers of students to warrant an additional teacher.

Mr. Markarian also explained that there are still a significant number of vacant positions and the district is finding it challenging to hire substitute teachers. The district welcomes any parent who

would like to fill out an application to work as a substitute teacher or special education aide.

## 5. Improved communication among various stakeholders

### a. Lunch & Learn Series

- These have been extremely well-received and will be a great resource now that they are posted on the special education website.
  - ★ Lunch & Learns will be enhanced for the 2022-23 school year. They will be recorded, and the Q&A section at the end of the session will not so that parents feel free to ask any questions without hesitation.
  - ★ Future presentations may include case managers and other members of the child study team to encourage collaboration between staff and parents. Conversation around preparing special education students to work toward independence.
  - ★ Topics such as preventing chronic absenteeism among special education students and how to better support siblings of special education students (e.g., workshops, informal get-togethers) will also be addressed.
  - ★ Special Services welcomes additional suggestions on useful topics for next year.
- Is it possible for parents to receive a confirmation of their registration indicating the date/time/link for each session?
  - ★ Currently, attendees must have a “BernardsBoe” email account to receive a confirmation. Special Services plans on having a more uniform RSVP process with links to zoom emailed after RSVP. Moving forward, there will be one flyer with a link and registration to be followed by confirmation.

### b. Need for consistency in/accessibility to information

- Website: What is the district plan and timeline for updating the Special Education section of the Bernards BOE website? What information on special education programs and services will be available online? Can there be a two-step process for finalizing so that basic information is provided now?
  - ★ This summer the website will be put into a new format and will be supplemented with information by September. Currently, all programs in the Special Education department are listed on the left side of the screen, and are linked to descriptions of each program, which will be enhanced with more detailed information.
- We would like to be able to provide parents with take-away brochures and website information on each program outlining services and student eligibility criteria (e.g., Resource Room services, LLD services, BD services, CBAP services, etc.). How can SEPAC help with this?
  - ★ Special Services thinks brochures on programs to give out at IEP meetings is a good idea. The department will be working with SEPAC over the coming year on developing

brochure take-aways for parents of students moving from one program to another as a guide to preparing for the transition.

c. Training

- SEPAC will provide training this Fall for PEC school representatives to help them respond to parent questions. It would be helpful to have special education case managers, teachers, and supervisors join these sessions if possible to provide accurate and consistent information that reps may share with parents in their schools.

★ Special Services can help Bernards PEC train SEPAC representatives. They can provide information on how to escalate issues and the differences between an individual vs systemic issue and how to distinguish between the two and appropriately respond.

6. We would like to work together with BT board members and administration to provide increased opportunities to embed education around neurodiversity and other disabilities throughout the educational setting

- US2 surveys and focus groups will help us understand and address concerns
- Review opportunities for more inclusion in all special education program
- Improve connections/peer relationships beyond occasional “diversity days” and extracurricular activities with more authentic classroom experiences
- Provide a greater variety of social skills and mentorship programs between special education and general education students around the concept of diversity rather than deficit

★ Special Services and PEC recognize that there are multiple opportunities for mentorship and collaboration throughout the district at all school levels, involving both PEC mentors and Big Siblings. We will continue to explore opportunities with Kristen Thorpe, who runs the Big Sibling program in our district.

★ It was also suggested that PEC sensitivity training could be incorporated in the wellness curriculum, and in the monthly character education curriculum in the elementary schools. PEC welcomes conversations on how we can contribute to this curriculum.

★ There are opportunities for integration at traditional school year activities. SEPAC Reps will work with school personnel to provide a list of grade level activities that occur each month throughout the year to be shared with special education parents at the beginning of the school year. In addition, each month SEPAC representatives will provide an updated list to be posted on the PEC web site.

7. Provide enhanced parent education and teacher support efforts

- Opportunities for SEPAC and PEC representative parents to meet with special education teachers and paraprofessionals to gain a better understanding of day to day responsibilities and how parents can better support teachers
- Use this forum as a springboard for parent education sessions focusing on building relationships with school staff

★ Special Services and SEPAC agree that we will collaborate with supervisors and CST staff to develop school-based workshops for parents on the topic of Preparing for IEP Meetings.

Points to cover will include:

- How to interpret progress reports on IEP goal
- How to determine which staff member can address specific concerns (teacher vs. case manager vs. supervisor vs. director)

## **8. Recommendations for structuring 2022-2023 SEPAC meetings**

Focus on broad issues to encourage collaborative discussions

Meeting agendas to be more directed, with possible topics as follows:

- June 2022: Introduce SEPAC representatives for 2022-2023
- September 2022: Beginning of school year  
School-based issues vs. SEPAC issues  
Establishing SEPAC goals for the year
- January 2023: Middle of school year  
What is working well at schools; what needs adjustment  
Preparing for IEP and Transition meetings
- April/May 2023: End of school year  
Review progress on identified SEPAC goals  
Identify areas for focus/education for 2023-2024
- June 2023: Introduce SEPAC representatives for 2023-2024