

April 13th 2009

Needham SEPAC Minutes

7:34 pm Sepac Co-Chair T. Stock made announcements and passed around info re: An ADHD talk sponsored by Children's Hospital, Spring Vacation Week programs and a Let's Play Motor Group at SNCARC. Dan Needham, acting interim sped director and Mary Lammi the incoming elementary sped director were introduced.

Coffee organized by M. Chieppo and M. Gray 4/30 at Panera's. 9:30 am. Email either an RSVP.

Co-Chair M. Callahan invites volunteers to serve next year on the Sepac Board. See, e or tel. Tee Stock, Maureen Callahan or Sandy Cisternelli for info. Lots of hands make light work. Continued thanks to Kim Marie Nichols' husband for the up and running Sepac website. Thanks to Sean Taylor for maintaining a listserv of relevant interests and info sharing. Sign up and let's get the conversation going! Summer School at Hillside will now be 4 days instead of 5.

S. Cisternelli introduced the evening's topic on **Inclusion**. Chris Brumbach assembled a panel of people from the district to offer their work and ideas towards inclusion: Dan Gutekanst, Superintendent, Michael Kascak, Hillside Principal, Heather Murphy, Hillside, Newman and Preschool Guidance Counselor, Leo Hogan, Asst. Principal, NHS.

CB: What do we do to support and include our sped students in the regular school day?

Needham offers many programs and interventions for a variety of sub groups of children with varying special needs, but tonight while aiming to illustrate the district's vision albeit in broadstrokes, CB aims to

1. Provide info about inclusion
2. Learn from the audience what our concerns are re: inclusion
3. What we can do/how to go forward from what we discuss tonight

DG: What is most important to us and for all of the children we educate is the 4 core values: scholarship, citizenship, community and personal growth. NPS creates goals and strives each day to make happen: standards based learning, social emotional learning (SEL) and active citizenship. Dr. G. witnessed recently NPS children engaged in all 3 goals. Preschool children during a morning meeting. 12 students during a middle school morning advisory. Watching NHS students participating in a KY Habitat for Humanity type project. While not perfect or even equal, children are living out the values being taught above.

CB notes that she has articles on how Needham has adapted the classroom in response to better practice for SEL and differently abled learners and how it benefits all children. CB is conducting a survey for all elementary teachers: how is Responsive Classroom (RC) and 2nd step working and not working?

Back to the construct of inclusion. Literally it means that children are taught with their peers and make effective progress. Effective inclusion serves all diversities of students and knows how to differentiate instruction.

1. Inclusion must meet the needs of the children
2. There must be knowledge on how to accommodate/modify for each child
3. Teachers need to be reflective about their teaching
4. There needs to be a collaborative culture to support that

Federal Regulations require that a “continuum of options” be provided and Needham provides a pretty broad range of programs that serves a broad range of special needs. CB mentioned briefly the ELC program as an example of a program that was needed and created to meet more intensive needs. CB believes to make inclusion work you need 3 things: Collaboration, curriculum modification and communication with parents as active partners.

MK is in his 13 year as an educator in NPS. 3rd year as principal and 10 years teaching at Hillside. First thing of importance for him (think of a triangle) is safety – physical and 2nd the emotional piece. Then 3rd, academic. Another vertex comes into play when including special needs children and that is the plan, 504 or IEP and those added supports to the other 3 points bringing best practice into the classroom which benefits all kids for example the graphic organizer, the home journal. Sharing of info – the cohort or consult meeting—is a big part of the fabric of the school. TA’s attend all Early Release day trainings and receive sped training at least 2 times a year. They get trained in RC and in years past bus drivers, cafeteria and office staff attended some of these trainings. Hillside has and continues an anti bullying program. The kids are doing a survey this year about bullying and the 4 and 5th grades will have breakout sessions to improve the info and knowledge (for admin) re: these issues and the anti bullying program. There are a lot of anti bullying programs going on in Needham.

HM caseload is 60% sped. HM spoke about RC. How in the first two weeks of school kids come up with the rules they shall abide by. How you respect peers and how you respect each other. She says RC is not just taught at morning mtg, but throughout the school day. 2nd Step is another program that they are looking to use and she has used with some groups. Steps to Accept is for the 4 and 5 graders. Englander came in and they found that 2nd grade concerns were the same as 5th grade concerns. (??) HM practices inclusion by running her ss groups within the classroom. Kids get to bring friends to lunch bunch. She does whole class lessons on people’s strengths and weaknesses. The specialists are always providing services within the classroom so the kids are used to seeing them there, they are a part of the classroom.

Leo Hogan spoke about how the sped classrooms are laid-out throughout the H. S., so they are not segregated to a specific area. Kids are integrated at lunch and have developed relationships with all the adults that they need to know there. The H.S. has hired a person to come in to work with the kids 18-22 to help develop job skills, functional life skills, and also take classes at Mass Bay Community College. There is reverse inclusion at the h.s. as well, having typical kids be student aides to others. There is Club Rocket Connection where the objective is to include the sped kids and involve them in different activities. Leo has a personal connection to a child with DS and

understands on a personal level that parent expectations are high and there too is a reality in there and that is where the partnership with parents begins.

Questions from the floor:

What measurements are there to see if the areas of community, personal growth and citizenship are moving forward? CB: There is the elementary school survey of RC. In 8th grade they assess Youth Risk. And this year there was a survey prior to implementation of Advisory and they will look at that again at year's end. Dr. G.: Futuristics is used to study alumni primarily academically, but Dr. G would like to look at and collect data in these other areas. This is an area we can improve. TSTA was mentioned, but it was not clear (to me) what this is/was.

Questions on communication arose: Is there a guideline on communicating via email? Dr. G advised that if you want to have a conversation with a teacher, email is not the tool.

Another parent suggests that communication is the part of the partnership that needs to be reinforced.

Other questions:

A parent asked when do we include the child? CB responded that the law requires children be included in their educational planning (IEP) at age 14. The questioner attempted to further clarify her question, but it remained unclear and a side conversation ensued between the questioner and another adult in the audience that was inaudible to the general audience.

A preschool parent made the comment that parents who choose to pay to send their children to the integrated Needham preschool understand what it means to have their children included with special needs children -- but parents at the elementary level may not have this understanding or even awareness -- perhaps more education on inclusion to the regular ed community at the elementary level would help.

What are the professional developments targeting? Is there any way for the parents to know what they are? T. Stock replied that a list of the professional development trainings has been requested from Sped Admin by the Sepac Board several times. CB said she could make these available. Dr. G. said he would like to see more teachers talking about how things are working or not working during some of these prof dev trainings.

Is there data on the effectiveness of RC? Currently only some children receive 2nd Step; When will all the children be educated in 2nd Step? Two parents noted that their special needs children benefited from the SEL curriculum, but found that typical children needed more practice.

It was mentioned by a parent that Disability Awareness go hand in hand for a successful SEL program and vice versa. Is there any disability awareness program in Needham? Currently, only at 2 elementary schools. CB acknowledged that work needs to be done to get a DA program out to all the schools.

Dr. G. would like to take all the concerns aired tonight and figure out how to “explicitly” take action on them vis a vis the (district?) goals.

Meeting ended 9:05.