

SEPAC Board/Needham SPED Administrator Meeting
 Tuesday, January 5, 2010
 12:30 pm

In Attendance:

Christine Brumbach – Director of Student Development and Program Evaluation
 Maureen Callahan – SEPAC Board Co-Chair, Broadmeadow liaison
 Sandy Cisternelli – SEPAC Board Programming Chair, Mitchell liaison
 Tom Denton – Director of Guidance
 Valerie Flynn – Director of Special Education, Middle School Level
 Mary Lammi – Director of Special Education, Preschool to Grade 5
 Iris Miller – School Psychologist, Special Education Intern
 Kori Rogers – SEPAC Board Co-Secretary, Newman liaison
 De Springer – SEPAC Board Co-Secretary
 Tee Stock – SEPAC Board Co-Chair, Broadmeadow liaison

Special Education Program Review – Christine Brumbach

In anticipation of the Coordinated Program Review (CPR) to be conducted by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) next year, Chris proposed to the School Committee at the December 15 meeting, that we begin a qualitative review of our special education program this year.

If following the Focus Groups it is determined that there is a need for external assistance, there is money available from the ARRA IDEA funds to support that.

The goal of the review is to determine the effectiveness and efficiency of our programs for children in our district and to establish a course of improvement for those areas identified as in need. Subjective and objective information will be gathered as follows:

1. Focus Groups of district stakeholders, including staff, parents, administrators, and students.
2. Data review of staffing patterns and student performance.
3. Surveys based on focus group findings.

Chris hopes to complete a summary report with findings and recommendations by April 2010. Focus groups are randomized. De noted the importance of having high school parents represented. Chris indicated that she keeps going back to groups that are underrepresented and acknowledged that high school parents have a low response rate.

Questions:

1. De—What is the difference between the CPR and your review?

Maureen noted that the CPR sounds like an audit

Valerie—The CPR is a quantitative review of procedures. It is not focused on the quality of the program or on program results.

Tee—The CPR auditors interview staff and parents. Any parent can ask to participate. The auditors pull files to look for procedural adherence.

Chris—Our review will be more qualitative, looking at the effectiveness of our program.

2. Kori—What questions will be asked during the focus groups? How will you ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute and that groups don't get sidelined by one or two topics at the expense of other issues?

Chris—I'm not going to tell you the questions, but they are the same questions for every group. Sue Bonaiuto is a skilled facilitator. She will start the sessions by setting the stage and getting quick responses from everyone, before asking more in depth-questions. There are not too many questions. Finally, group members will be asked to write something, so they will have an opportunity to note issues that were not discussed.

Chris—I assume that out of all of the information gathered there will be two or three themes that stand out as needing follow up. We do not want to bite off more than we can chew, so the plan is to make two to three recommendations for areas that need further review.

3. De—What's the answer to "How can you review yourself—it's a conflict of interest?"

Chris—Well that's partly why we tried to bring in an outside person early on, but it was too early in the process. We may want to bring in an outside person later on as areas of need become more apparent.

Kori—I'm going to play devil's advocate and suggest that even if you generate the questions, which may be the right way to go, you may get different answers if you bring in an outside facilitator to conduct the focus groups than you will by having a staff member facilitate the focus groups.

Tee—I think that's especially true for staff members.

Chris—I really do not think that will be an issue.

4. De—What other communities have done this kind of review? How have the reviews been used?

Chris—Sharon, Wellesley, and Lincoln-Sudbury have done reviews. Wellesley's review was simply a data comparison with other towns and didn't look at qualitative issues.

Tee—Newton did a comprehensive review a few years ago of ASD and social skills services. They hired Dot Lucci and Scott McLeod from Youthcare to conduct the review. (Note: This year their SC is hiring an outside consultant to conduct a nuts to bolts sped review.)

De—I know several parents that have left Wellesley with the change in Sped directors there.

5. Kori—How will you follow up with parents who have participated in the review? I've heard from parents who have participated in earlier focus groups who felt their concerns were not addressed and who did not know what happened after the review.

Chris—I plan to follow up with everyone who participates. I will also make sure participants know when we will report results to the School Committee.

Introductions—Valerie Flynn

Before moving on, I want to take this opportunity to introduce Iris Miller. Iris is a school psychologist at Pollard. She is getting licensed in Special Education and is my intern, so she will be shadowing me.

Members of the group welcomed Iris and introduced themselves.

School Health Advisory Council –Tom Denton

The school health advisory council includes Mimi Stamer, Director of Nursing, Kathy M. Pinkham, Director of Health and Physical Education, Ruth Griffin, Director of Food Services, and Chris Brumbach.

Tom—As part of our work, we are developing recommendations for Social Emotional Learning (SEL). Tom distributed a PowerPoint slide with recommendations made to the School Committee as follows:

SEL Building Based/ District Wide

1. Structural Supports are essential
2. Accountability at building and district level
3. Assessment tools utilized
4. Strengthen teacher observation tool regarding SEL
5. Utilize skilled SEL staff as mentors
6. Assess SEL climate in each school including classroom, cafeteria, advisory, recess, and other school areas
7. Parent outreach to support and reinforce student SEL learning
8. Review SEL materials and curriculum on regular basis. Social Emotional Learning changes as community and culture change

With regard to point 4, Tom noted that teachers at the elementary level are generally attuned to and skilled at observing SEL behaviors. Teachers at the Middle School and High School are more focused on content areas and need better tools for observing SEL behaviors.

In terms of assessment, Tom noted that we do a lot of surveys, but they tend to focus on social climate, rather than on acquiring SEL skills. We need tools to assess the latter. The list of SEL skills is quite long. The School Health Advisory Council identified the following five areas as the focus for skill acquisition.

Specific SEL Skills Taught and Reinforced

1. Ability to positively connect with staff and peers
2. Resilience regarding academic, social, and emotional challenges
3. Ability to solve problems and resolve conflict in a positive manner
4. Ability to avoid high-risk behaviors
5. SEL skills evolve as demands of community and culture change

In closing, Tom addressed the importance of ensuring continuity in SEL programming. For example, if we introduce an anti-bullying program at the elementary level, it is important to bring the program to the Middle Schools as well. Students should not be expected to learn new programs at each school.

Update of Extended School Year Review—Mary Lammi

First, for clarification, Mary welcomes parent input during this process, but there is not a formal committee for parents to join. There has been some confusion over this. There may have been earlier discussion about forming a committee.

So far the review has been primarily internal with a focus on putting systems in place to understand eligibility requirements, including identifying systems of data collection. For the most part, eligibility is very straightforward, but there are some students for whom eligibility is less straightforward, so it is important to review data regarding regression during breaks.

In terms of programming, Mary participated in a meeting about building use during summer 2010. At this point, it appears that Pollard and Broadmeadow will be off line for maintenance and construction projects. Eliot, Newman, High Rock, and the High School may be available, but no final decisions have been made.

Mary would prefer to have all programs in the same building in order to facilitate oversight as well as staffing. For example, hiring a nurse for one building is more cost-effective than having to hire additional nurses.

Kori—Are staff prepared to discuss summer services at this point? We have our IEP meeting this week.

Mary—In some cases, team members are postponing detailed discussions until later in the year, though team members can provide a framework.

Tee and Maureen—It is essential that parents receive adequate notice about the programs, so they can plan. Some staff members complained about students not attending every day last summer. Parents may sign up their children for summer camps etc. not knowing the dates for summer services. Also, last summer, one program was changed from five days to four days with very little notice. Working parents were left scrambling to arrange childcare.

Mary—That's important information for me to know. I can make sure that the dates are finalized and communicated in a timely manner.

Tee—Recommends hiring one or more school nurses to fill teaching assistant or other staffing positions. This kills two birds with one stone.

Mary—Will review nursing requirements and policies and work to ensure adequate staffing to meet the health and safety needs of the students.

Disability Awareness—Mary Lammi

Mary had a good conversation with Mitchell Principal Mike Schwinden before break.

Sandy—There was an announcement in Mitchell's School Bulletin

Other

Budget issues. Currently, the Special Education Program is expected to see a reduction of one COTA position. For more information about the budget process, click on [FY11 Budget Process, Calendar and Guidelines](#).

Respectfully Submitted,
Kori Rogers