

SEPAC Board/Needham SPED Administrator Meeting

Tuesday, March 10, 2009 12:30 pm

In Attendance:

Christine Brumbach, Sandy Cisternelli, Valerie Flynn, Cathy Heller, Kori Rogers, De Springer, Tee Stock, Megan Zweiback

Administration:

A. Parents Rights/ Responsibilities Presentation – Christine

Should we host in evening or during day? Typically held in evening with attendance of 20 or so parents. Last year held during the day, 8 parents attended.

Parent feedback: This presentation, while required by law, is not high on parent interest survey, so host when best for staff. If during day, do not host on early release day. Choose time that does not conflict with drop-off and pick-up at any of the schools.

B. Staffing Issues – Megan

- There are three known maternity leaves to plan for in Speech/Language, one each at the preschool, Hillside, and Broadmeadow. Speech/Language positions are difficult to fill.
- There's an opening for a new FTE ELC II teacher at Hillside starting in the fall.
- A Mitchell liaison is retiring. The position has been posted.

C. Preschool Summer Program – Chris

Diane Dunham, the new Preschool Coordinator is taking over the Preschool Summer Program and will be initiating changes, such as including tuition-paying students during some weeks of the program. Tee notes that parent feedback about this new option is very positive.

Parent Questions – Tee

1. Parents do not understand the role of liaisons and team chairs.

Clarification – Staff

Liaisons at all levels (Preschool, ES, MS, HS*) have the same responsibilities:

- Case management, including ensuring students receive all services in IEP, communication, paperwork, and academic testing.

- Provide direct services in or out of classroom.
- Provide inclusion support.
- Immediately forward all requests for student evaluation to Team Chair.
- Supervise TA's
- Run IEP meetings that are not evaluation meetings (annual reviews), and have the authority to commit resources for the services included in the IEP.

HS liaisons do not go into classrooms. Students come out for services.

Team Chairs – 2 FTE at ES level, ½ time at MS, ½ times at HS:

- Chair every evaluation meeting.
- Can commit resources for services.
- Respond to all requests for student evaluation.

Inclusion facilitators – this term not used in Needham. The comparable position is probably the Teaching Assistant – Chris

Suggestion – Kori

Last fall providers sent letters introducing themselves to parents. Some parents received individual letters from each provider. Some parents did not receive letters. Perhaps starting this fall, parents/guardians of each student receiving services should get one welcome letter with the names/responsibilities/contact information of all providers and liaisons involved in their child's (children's) care.

2. Is there any policy precluding staff from sending reports to parents via email?

Parents often receive reports two days before a meeting, which does not allow sufficient time to copy and mail them to consultants to prepare for meetings. Some parents would prefer to receive reports via email, so they can simply forward the report in real time.

Response – Staff

There is no policy against doing this. However, Chris expressed concerns about sending Word files (which can be edited). It was noted that staff are not trained to convert files to PDFs (which cannot be edited). There's some concern about confidentiality, and errors (such as sending to wrong email address). Chris requested time to double check the regulations, and Megan asked for a month to train all staff on how to create and email PDF files.

3. Is the list of professional trainings available?

Response – Megan

Not yet, but I'm working on it.

4. Where are student files kept, and how do parents get access?

Response – Chris

Parents have the right to see their child's files at any time. They need to make an appointment, and sign the sign-in sheet. There is a charge for copies. SPED students have three files:

- Individual files at the Elementary Schools or Grade Level Office do not include SPED information
- SPED files are in the Administration Building
- Health files

Chris indicated that staff members who are providing services to students do not need to sign the sign-in sheet when looking at the records. Tee noted that when she read the regulations, she understood that only the administrator (team chair) did not need to sign in, but all other staff did need to sign in. This question was not resolved.

Inclusion – Group Discussion

As a follow up to our last meeting, where Chris recommended parents contact Principals and School Councils at their respective schools to discuss issues that may be considered building-based, such as inclusion, De met with Newman's Assistant Principal Mark McAneny. Mark noted that aside from the disability awareness program (which is not in place at Newman), there isn't much else in the way of addressing inclusion for the larger school community at Newman.

Chris took issue with this characterization because Newman is an inclusion school. Theoretically, inclusion is a part of the daily curriculum. She noted that Mark has only been here for five months. De clarified that Mark said he would like to see all teachers become inclusion teachers. He mentioned his experience in Brookline.

This led to a discussion of how we are defining “inclusion.” Are we talking about specific children in specific programs? De is talking about the general culture of our community and how we treat everyone. Sandy noted that she reviewed the Mitchell School Improvement Plan and diversity does not seem to include SPED. Cathy Heller is currently taking an inclusion class offered by Angie DiNapoli and Rose Green. Many Newman teachers are in the class.

Kori noted that bullying continues to be an issue at Newman, particularly at recess. Chris noted that Newman brought in Elizabeth Englander for separate teacher and parent workshops on bullying. There was much discussion on bullying, especially the feeling that SPED parents spend an enormous time teaching their children social skills, which other children seem to blatantly ignore without repercussion. De will follow up with Emilie Green about this getting to the children and the broader school community.

Given the differences and confusion around the use of the word inclusion and what a person may mean, De acknowledged that this is messy. While we will not reach any resolutions at one meeting, inclusion is important to parents, and we have promised them an inclusion program on April 13, with at least two principals on the panel to discuss their view of inclusion and how it works at their schools. Chris indicated that while she and Dr. Gutekanst are open to throwing themselves into messy waters, principals are not and are resistant to opening themselves up to “gee that’s a great program at X school, why aren’t we doing that?” situations. Nonetheless, Chris committed to making sure that something happens on April 13, and will try to ensure that two principals are in attendance. She will also start a discussion with principals regarding how inclusion and recess can potentially be part of the district initiatives for next year.

Tee noted that parents have been asking for principals to attend a PAC meeting for the past three years. They just want to be heard and to know that principals are willing to give them their time.

Disability Awareness:

Megan will speak to Dan Needham about helping move forward the Disability Awareness agenda for next year while she is out.

June PAC Meeting:

Cathy Heller will be in touch with Alisa Skatrud (Sandy gave Cathy Alisa’s email address) to help find parent panelists for a discussion of *The Emotional Stresses of Parenting a Child with Special Needs* for the June PAC meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 1:50 pm.