

**Minutes of the Needham Special Education Parents Advisory Council (SEPAC)
Meeting of September 14, 2009
Broadmeadow Elementary School
Needham, MA 02492**

I. Announcements – Tee Stock and Maureen Callahan, Co-Chairs SEPAC, Sandy Cisternelli, Chair, Programming

- Steve Ryan of the Needham Times is writing an [article](#) about the Needham SEPAC. Look for the article this Thursday, September 17. (A photographer came to the first part of this meeting to take pictures to accompany the article)
- Save the dates for the following meetings/events:
 - ✓ **SEPAC Parent Coffee** - Tuesday, September 15 at 9:00 am at Panera Bread.
 - ✓ **Public Hearing on Newman Renovation** -Tuesday, September 15 at 7:00 pm. Public Hearing on the Newman Renovation Project in the Performance Center at Broadmeadow Elementary School.
 - ✓ **Basic Rights** - Monday, October 19 at 7:00 pm (monthly SEPAC meeting). Eileen Haggerty, attorney with Kotin Crabtree and Strong presents **Basic rights**.
 - ✓ **Behavior and Discipline Strategies** - Monday, November 9 at 7:00 pm (monthly SEPAC meeting). The Federation for children with Special Needs presents **Behavior and Discipline Strategies**.
- Flyers with information about community meetings/events/programs were available for members to take home. Flyers that were in limited supply were circulated so that attendees could peruse them and copy down information.
- SEPAC volunteers are still needed. Sign-up sheets were available.
- [School Liaisons](#) were introduced. Liaisons are a conduit between the parent community at each of the schools, the SEPAC board, and the school administration. Liaisons inform the administration about parent concerns, questions, compliments (when parents want anonymity), and provide contact information for administrators when parents (not requesting anonymity) are not sure whom to contact with questions, etc. Liaisons also keep parents informed about new initiatives and SEPAC events.

II. What's New in Needham Special Education, presented by the [Needham Special Education Administrators](#). Sandy Cisternelli introduced the speakers:

- **Christine Brumbach**, Director of Student Development and Program Evaluation
- **Mary Lammi**, Director of Special Education, Preschool to Grade 5
- **Valerie Flynn**, Director of Special Education, Middle School (High Rock and Pollard)
- **Cathy Heller**, Director of Student Support Services, High School
- **Diane Dunham**, Preschool Coordinator

The PowerPoint presentation can be viewed at needhamsepac.org. Supplemental notes are included as follows:

- The acronym ARRA stands for American Recovery and Reinvestment Act
- The acronym IDEA stands for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- One of the three proposed initiatives for ARRA IDEA funds, a review of the special education program, generated a bit of discussion. Mary Lammi addressed parent questions about this initiative. She participated in a review in Shrewsbury where stakeholders looked at key factors in programming to determine strengths and weaknesses. The review provided data to guide budget decisions and helped the community understand “what we were doing.”
- Tee Stock asked if there were sample reviews from other districts that Needham Administrators found particularly useful. Christine Brumbach cited several communities, Shrewsbury, Sharon, Lincoln, and indicated that she has someone in mind to implement a program review in Needham.
- Tee added that she hoped a program review would include a large component for social skills, which is one of the SEPAC board’s two key areas of concern.
- The Middle School student advisories also generated questions. Student advisories, comprised of 12-14 students and one staff member, meet for twenty minutes per day plus a longer period once a week to engage in discussion and activities geared toward developing a sense of community. Students with IEPs and typically developing students work together. The members of the group remain the same throughout the year, but change from year to year. Every staff member has a student advisory. Special Education Liaisons work with typically developing students as well as those with IEPs.
- Chris noted that research indicates that the most meaningful thing for students is to have at least one strong relationship with an adult in school. One goal of advisories is to provide this type of relationship. For more information use the following links: [High Rock Student Advisory Program](#), [Pollard Student Advisory](#).
- This led to a discussion about transition plans for students moving from High Rock to Pollard. Parents asked if members of the High Rock Staff will move up to Pollard (loop) with the students. They will not. The schools will continue to follow a cluster model.
- One parent asked about flex time at Pollard. Valerie explained that every student has flex time to get extra support from teachers. During flex time, students with special needs can get services/support in Learning Centers, which take place in general education classrooms when typical kids are not there. Flex time ensures that students do not miss out on band, music, or other electives.

- The High School is adding an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher to tutor 10th graders at risk for failing the ELA MCAS. There is an effective math tutoring program already in place. There is a new reading class for 10-12 students with significant reading issues.
- Chris concluded the presentation by noting that staff members welcome parent questions, comments, complaints, and compliments. They strive to reply to parent calls and emails within 24 hours. [Click here for contact information.](#)

III. Questions and Answers

Five parent questions were submitted to Chris Brumbach in advance of the meeting. Only two were answered.

1. Is there a BCBA at each school?

Chris responded that a lot more of our staff has attended BCBA training, but she does not know if there is a BCBA trained staff member at every building. She suggested parents contact the Special Education staff directly to find out the qualifications of staff members working with their children.

2. Where and when do special education staff use ABA.

3. Is there a program for kids with dyslexia?

We have a language-based classroom and a number of reading programs, such as [Lindamood-Bell](#), Empower, [Project Read](#), and [Wilson](#).

4. What is in place for kids who need social programs?

5. What specialists does Needham consult with for their programs?

Additional parent questions:

1. Is there something in place for Disability Awareness at the Middle School and the High School?

Chris responded that disability awareness looks very different at the Middle School and the High School than at the preschool and elementary schools. Awareness programs at the younger levels focus on visible disabilities. Many disabilities experienced by students are not visible (Aspergers, non-verbal language disorders, etc.). At the older grades the focus is on social-emotional learning. Valerie noted that the student advisories play a role at the Middle School level and Cathy added that the mentor homerooms contribute at the high school.

2. Will Newman ELC students remain at Newman during the proposed renovation, or will they be relocated to another school?

Chris responded that the current plan has Newman preschoolers and kindergartners relocated to Pollard during the renovation, while Newman first-graders through fifth-graders are located in

modular units on the Newman campus during the renovation. There may be some splitting of the ELC, but nothing has been decided yet.

3. When the Newman renovation is completed, will the modular units be available for other programs, in particular for special education programs?

Chris responded that programming, particularly special needs programming, is developed around the needs of the students at each school. The modulars themselves are not portable and cannot be moved to other locations, and it's not really feasible to develop programming based on the location of the modulars. Also, if the modulars were portable, they would likely be relocated to Hillside or Mitchell, which are overcrowded and have modulars written into the Town Capital Improvement Plan (pending funding).

Meeting adjourned at 9:00pm.

Respectfully Submitted by
Kori Rogers