

**Minutes of the Needham Special Education Parents Advisory Council
Meeting of January 11, 2010
Broadmeadow Elementary School
Needham, MA 02492**

**I. Welcome and Announcements – Tee Stock and Maureen Callahan, Co-Chairs
Needham SEPAC**

Tee

First, what is a PAC?

Massachusetts general laws mandate Parent Advisory Councils in Special Education. Our role is to:

- advise the district on matters that pertain to the education and safety of students with disabilities;
- meet regularly with school officials, and;
- participate in the planning, development, and evaluation of the school district's special education programs.

There are three presentations this evening:

1. Disability Awareness
2. Social Skills Survey Results and Recommendations (SEPAC parent survey)
3. Social Emotional Learning Survey Results (district teacher survey)

Also of note, the Superintendent sent parents a [Parent Survey](#), which I encourage everyone to complete. If you want to see Disability Awareness programs at all of the schools in Needham, please write that in your survey.

We have many members of the administration with us today, including:

Mary Lammi—Director of Special Education, Preschool to Grade 5
Dr. Valerie Flynn—Director of Special Education, Middle School Level
Cathy Heller—Director of Student Support Services at the High School
Christine Brumbach—Director of Student Development and Program Evaluation
Diane Dunham—Preschool Coordinator
Emily Gaberman—Principal of Broadmeadow
Iris Miller—School Psychologist at the Middle School

Maureen

Our upcoming events include:

February 8 Effective Communication with Your IEP Team
Presented by Cynthia Moore, Federation for Children with Special Needs

March 8 Differentiated Instruction

We need volunteers in two areas:

Mary Lammi is putting together a committee to help create Disability Awareness programs at Broadmeadow, Mitchell and Newman elementary schools. If you're interested in joining this committee, there's a sign up sheet at the back of the room, or you can contact Mary at mary_lammi@needham.k12.ma.us.

Also, we need to put together an election committee. Several board members' terms expire this Spring. Elections will be held in May to fill these positions with new members. Volunteers are needed to recruit members for these board positions and to manage the election process (which starts in March and concludes in May). Minimal time commitment is involved, and specific guidelines/directions are provided in our bylaws. There's a sign up sheet at the back of the room or you can email Maureen Callahan (maurcallahan@comcast.net) or Tee Stock (edandtee@rcn.com) if you can help SEPAC with this process.

Other news:

Marie Chieppo is hosting SEPAC parents for coffee at Finagle a Bagel on Tuesday, January 19th at 9:30 a.m. Please RSVP to Marie at chieppo@rcn.com if you plan to attend.

WGBH Radio announced 10-part series on special education in Massachusetts beginning Monday, January 11 on 89.7 WGBH, WCAI 90.1, 91.1 and 94.3 for the Cape and Islands. A complete archive of each report will be available online at www.wgbh.org/897.

Thank you to Marie Chieppo for organizing our monthly coffees. They've been very well attended, and we appreciate her taking the time to coordinate these gatherings.

Thank you to Kori Rogers who recently resigned from our Board to begin student teaching. Please welcome Cathy Aikman to the SEPAC Board. Cathy will now be serving as co-secretary with De Springer.

II. Presentation – Eliot and Hillside Disability Awareness Programs presented by Anne Weinstein and Kathy DeMayo (Hillside) and Jacquie Sherman, Stacie Shapiro, and Martha Cohen Barrett (Eliot)

De Springer introduces our guest speakers (see above) who will discuss the Disability Awareness Programs they created and implement at their schools.

Anne Weinstein begins the presentations. She thanks the PTCs for their funding and provides a brief history of the Disability Awareness Programs.

Click [Disability Awareness Presentation](#) to read the complete presentation. Highlights follow:

Anne describes the conceptual basis of the programs:

- Programs ARE NOT intended to teach students in detailed way about particular types of disabilities

- Programs ARE intended to teach students that people are similar to and different from other people in a variety of ways
- Programs consistently emphasize the importance of viewing each person as an individual, and of not defining or judging someone by his or her disability
- Because of their focus/purpose, POD/DA are diversity programs as much as they are disability awareness programs

The programs depend on a strong volunteer base and have a three-tiered volunteer structure:

- Multi-year program co-chairs
- Grade-level coordinators
- Classroom/grade-specific volunteers

Five units are taught, one unit at each grade level as follows:

1st grade - Visual Impairments

2nd grade - Deaf and Hard of Hearing

3rd grade - Physical Challenges

4th grade - Learning Differences

5th grade – Intellectual Disabilities/Developmental Delays

The programs are intended to support Needham’s district goal of promoting active citizenship, Objective 2 of District Goal #3:

“Students will develop competencies to enable them to understand and effectively address matters of diversity, racism, ethnocentrism, and bias in the context of the pluralistic communities in which they live.”

Kathy DeMayo describes the nuts and bolts of the programs.

Training is key. Grade level coordinators help with training. They lay out the program in detail. They provide a script parents can use. Today first grade parents were trained. They had the opportunity to do a dry run in order to work out kinks.

Principal support is essential. They provide teacher resources. Teacher support is also critical as teachers give up classroom time so that we can implement the programs.

Keep the following point sin mind when developing a Disability Awareness Program:

- Realistic goals/expectations – start small!
- Identification of long-term, dedicated program leaders/coordinators
- Committed volunteer base
- Funding sources (PTC, other?)
- Program support from school community
- Partnership with another elementary school (when possible)

Questions:

In terms of what kids see, how long are the workshops, and how frequently do they take place?

Worskshps take place once a year, with 50 minutes typically devoted to hands-on activities

followed by 20 minutes for guest speakers.

Do the themes stay the same?

Yes. The themes are the same each year, so that by the end of grade five, students have experienced five different units.

How did you decide on which units to include?

We conducted a great deal of research and selected themes from among those used by Newton and the Children's Museum as they seemed to meet best practices in terms of providing tangible units for the younger children and progressing to less tangible programs in the older grades.

What do workshops look like?

They are very hands-on. For instance, at Eliot, students put on blindfolds to experience blindness/visual. The students walked to MacDonald's while blindfolded and had to order from a menu. They had helpers. In one unit, students were blindfolded and had to build Lego structures. The little ones did not understand that they would not be able to distinguish different colored Legos by the way they feel.

Kim Marie Nichols developed the grade two curriculum on deafness and hearing impairment. She described the four hands-on stations:

- Teaching sign language
- Taking an unfair hearing test
- Lip reading
- Test of contributions made by the deaf or hearing impaired, such as the football huddle.
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Grace added that there are presentation boards showcasing notable people with disabilities.

How many parent volunteers conduct workshops?

A lot! In a class of 20, students will be divided into four groups of five with two parent volunteers facilitating each group, plus a roving volunteer and a timekeeping volunteer.

Anne—It's our jobs as the co-chairs to stress. We do not want our volunteers to stress. We take it one event at a time. If there are not enough parent volunteers on a given day, we will drop one of the units. The program does not have to be perfect to be effective, and the kids love the program.

How do you coordinate one speaker with two schools?

Usually the programs are held back to back with the speaker starting at one school and moving to the other. For example, *Dancing Wheels* performed at Hillside in the morning and Eliot in the afternoon.

Mary Lammi thanks the speakers for a great presentation.

"My part is easy. I just need volunteers. De and I have been working closely to see what these programs can be. Our next step is to bring the process to the schools. There's a sign up sheet at the back of the room if you'd like to attend an introductory meeting.

III. Needham SEPAC Survey of Parents' Impressions of District Social Skills Services— Cathy Aikman and Sean Taylor

Cathy provides an overview of the survey. The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey.

The response rate was 26%, which is considered strong. Findings include:

- Social Skills are on IEP of 76% of respondents
- 86% of respondents think their kids need special help with SS
- 63% of respondents are or have paid for private SS
- 39% of respondents did not know if their child was exposed to Responsive Classroom or Second Step
- 48 % Satisfaction with SS training of own kids vs. 21% satisfaction with SS training of all kids

Click [PowerPoint Presentation](#) to see the complete presentation.

Sean presents the four following recommendations for collaborative program improvements:

1. Implement a district-wide disability awareness program
2. Provide additional training for teaching assistants and recess staff
3. Include an analysis of social skills programming as part of the ARRA funded special education program review
4. Provide a “Social exchange” to help children to practice their social skills outside of school

Click [Social Skills Recommendations](#) to read full report.

Comments:

With regard to point one, Grace observes that you really need committed volunteers to launch the Disability Awareness Program.

Tee notes that you also need the support of the school principal. Last year Broadmeadow had the volunteers, but the principal was not ready.

With regard to point four, Steve Springer indicates that one way to motivate parents of typical children to play with children who need to practice social skills is the offer of free babysitting (e.g. the drop-off playdate).

Sean responds that we would expect parents of each child to participate in order to help facilitate the playdate, thereby eliminating the opportunity for babysitting.

IV. Special Education Administration Report—Chris Brumbach

Chris reports the results of the Needham Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Survey Results. This was a survey of teachers about their classroom practice of Responsive Classroom and Second Step, two SEL programs in the district. Responsive Classroom is the foundational Social Skills program at the elementary level. Second Step provides direct social skill instruction in a weekly ½ hour lesson.

113 of 129 teachers responded to the survey, for a response rate of 86%. Teachers were surveyed while participating in a professional development training.

Of the respondents:

- 87% reported that they had participated in a week long training in Responsive Classroom
- 89% reported frequently using morning meeting or other Responsive Classroom practices

- 39% reported that the weekly Second Step lesson is conducted frequently. However, the lessons were almost always conducted by someone other than the classroom teacher (e.g. guidance counselor).

Click [Needham Social Emotional Learning Survey](#) to read a complete summary of the results.

Chris notes that Second Step has a great parent component, but the teachers were not aware of the materials.

Tom Denton, Director of Guidance, is bringing Elizabeth Englander to the Middle School for an anti-bullying program. Englander presented a program at the elementary schools last year.

One ongoing concern is the generalization of social skills—that is students using skills learned in the classroom when they are in other settings, such as the cafeteria or at recess. Staff who work in the cafeteria and at recess have been trained in Responsive Classroom. However, it's harder than you think to get the training to stick.

The principals are concerned and have been working to answer the question, “How can we establish a positive culture within our schools?”

Chris reports that this is a bad budget year. The public hearing on the budget is Wednesday, January 20. This is a combined meeting of the School Committee and the Selectman. Chris has proposed hiring an autism specialist, using money that is currently used to hire consultants.

Questions and Comments

Tee notes that the new standards-based report card is completed by teachers, who do not observe students in recess and at the cafeteria, so how can they assess students' social skills?

Cathy notes that Elizabeth Englander did not speak at all of the elementary schools last year. For example, she did not speak at Broadmeadow. Cathy did see Englander at Mitchell, where Englander's presentation focused on cyberbullying rather than person-to-person bullying.

Chris responds that she will check to see what Englanders will be presenting, her program at Newman was not on cyberbullying.

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.

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 using focus groups of district stakeholders, a data review of staffing patterns and student performance, and surveys based on focus group findings.

Chris hopes to complete a summary report with findings and recommendations by April 2010.

Respectfully Submitted,

