

Greenwich Special Education Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

November 9, 2021

Google Meets Virtual Meeting 6:30PM

- 1) **Attendance:** (26) Andi Cosby, Audra O'Donovan, Abigail Anders, Caroline Lerum, Clare Lawler Kilgallen, Dawn Zimmerman, Elizabeth Forger, Erin Montague, Greenwich Free Tutors, Jenni Reynolds, Jennifer Kutai, John Campos, Karen Hirsch, Katie Cooperman, Kimberly O'Donnell, Laura Luckenbach, Leah Thornton, Lindsey Eisenstein, Lorelei O'Hagan, Michael-Joseph Mercanti-Anthony, Michelle Colev, Naomi Nova, Robyn Baldwin, Dr. Stacey Heiligenthaler, Virginia Plath-Kelly, Yuqi Wang
- 2) **Opening Remarks from Chairperson** – Dawn Zimmerman called the meeting to order at 6:34pm
- 3) **Public Comment**
 - a) Michael-Joseph Mercanti-Anthony said he will need to be replaced for community member due to his election to the BOE
- 4) **Approval of Meeting Minutes 9/14/21** – motion to approve with spelling corrections noted by Dr. Heiligenthaler, second by Naomi Nova, all in favor, none opposed
- 5) **Remarks and updates from Superintendent** – Dr. Toni Jones was not able to attend
- 6) **Remarks and updates from Chief Officer of Special Education and Student Supports** – main update is the action plan, so will wait for comments
- 7) **Comments from Subcommittees Chairs**
 - a) **IEP Sub-Committee** - Caroline Lerum – Elizabeth Forger agreed to chair
 - i) New IEP document coming out this summer
 - b) **Eligibility Sub-Committee** - Jen Kutai – Meeting 11/17
 - c) **Enrichment Sub-Committee** – Jenni Reynolds agreed to chair
 - d) **Nominating Sub-Committee** – Katie Bistran
 - i) Openings
 - (1) Kim O'Donnell offered to take alternate roll
 - (2) Kathy and Katie did work on this today, and are evaluating the opening positions
 - (a) Discussed if we should allow general ed parents to have a spot on SEAC – we would need to motion on this, our bi-laws say you have to have a child on an IEP or with a 504
 - (i) Anyone can join the meetings and parents who are in the evaluation process are eligible to serve on the SEAC
 - (ii) Katie commented that other SEAC's did open up to general membership, doing research on things other SEAC's have adapted as they had more experience
 - (b) Dawn Zimmerman will send out brief descriptions of each position
 - (c) Dawn Zimmerman motioned to approve Kim O'Donnell for alternate roll, Katie Bistran seconded, all in favor, none opposed
 - (d) Danielle Jacobs motioned to put Jen Kutai back on the board, Dawn Zimmerman seconded, all in favor, none opposed
- 8) **Review Special Education Action Plan** – Dr. Stacey Heiligenthaler

a) Key Points

- i) Action plan is to make sure progress is being made toward recommendations from PCG
- ii) Some overlap for topics across recommendations
- iii) 6 goals that are set to be met by September 2024
- iv) Looked where recommendations aligned, and determined steps to reach the goals
 - (1) Are we evaluating students on time? Appropriately? Measuring that students are making progress? Are we putting advanced placement where appropriate? Is the team working collaboratively?
- v) Included multiple stakeholders- special ed coordinators, building leaders, finance, parents, etc.
- vi) For this school year – UDL training this year – will be able to look at what happened this year and determine plan for next year
- vii) A lot of collaboration between SDSS and UDL
 - (1) Not just driven out of Special Education, but driven out of the School District as a whole
- viii) This draft is to get community input and get feedback – this will remain a working document
 - (1) Anyone will be able to access most recent version on the website

b) Parent Questions

- i) **Q:** Are there plans to have teachers trained on more extensive dyslexia programs?
A: We need to make sure anyone trained is using it and it is the appropriate technique
- ii) **Q:** With the Evaluation Process/Child Find could there be an incentive for everyone to be comfortable and parents and teachers feel like partners? How is this going to look?
A: Working with teams on timelines and referrals. Students should not be in MTSS for a long time. There is a Committee working on what is MTSS going to look like moving forward. Also working with Dr. Gabriel from UCONN to see how we measure intervention toward closing the gap with meaningful progress. Looking at universal design for learning. First did all staff pre-K to HS Universal Design for Learning training to determine what needs of students and plan for all students. Want to insure students are getting high quality education, and if there is a need that they move quickly to evaluation and services.
- iii) **Q:** Question is about RTI and Early Intervention. There are known issues with RTI and we want to be sure we are getting accurate data for our students. Do teachers and evaluators understand or is the issue how the data is being collected?
 - (a) MTSS – we see the action steps, what was meant by guard rails?
A: Manual is being created to guide the process. Addressing -What needs to occur in a meeting about a student? How do we measure meaningful progress? How do we progress monitor to see how a student is progressing?
- iv) **Q:** Will parents be delivered information about the progress?
A: Working with curriculum department to use data to communicate in a meaningful way
 - (a) Going to train in March on MTSS manual

- (b) Dr. Markus and Dr. H will be a part of MTSS groups to make sure everything is appropriately implemented
 - (c) Vision- what supports we want to have for students and address the whole child
- v) Caroline Lerum – Overarching comments
 - (1) Thanked Dr. H for her hard work and all she is doing
 - (2) Feedback is to make it as parent friendly as possible (layman’s terms)
 - (3) Hyperlink terms to the meaning of abbreviations and programs
 - (4) More explanations, presentation, or something to have parents fully understand what everything means
 - (a) Karen Hirsch – presentation for BOE scheduled for December, need parent document not a translation that only teacher staff would know
 - (5) Can there be a policy to let parents know their child is in RTI and what that is?
 - (6) Dr. Stacey Heiligenthaler’s remarks
 - (a) Language pulled from the report, and state docs, but can definitely be revised
 - (b) Gaps in services analysis
 - (i) Where out of district placements are
 - (ii) Where the struggle is in the district for placement
 - 1. Unique learners at upper elementary
 - 2. State has starting in 3rd grade alternate placement for students programing that the district doesn’t have
 - 3. PINE or NEST co-teaching is a research based program for supporting kids with autism as well as other students that need support
 - 4. Reading teacher support
 - 5. Inclusion specialist to go through process of how support is available in the classroom
 - 6. Why are students leaving Greenwich and use those data points to look at next year
 - (iii) What would new programming be?
 - 1. A- they have recommendations and there are lots of programming they want to do, but it will be in steps to ensure it is done well
 - 2. Roll out over next couple of years
 - 3. The budget is an issue, need the budget support to make progress
 - (iv) So many new things happening, some quick and some far out. Why are some things talked about at board meetings, and others not?
 - 1. KH – board agendas are set every month at the start of the year. As the audit goes on, cannot discuss every month. A lot of work takes longer so spaced out through the year on the agendas.
 - 2. Budget just sent to BOE, then goes to RTM and BET.
 - 3. A lot going on at Havemeyer. New curriculum team that presented a 5-year curriculum improvement plan, which will benefit all students.
- vi) Q: Is there a plan to improve identification for 2E students?

- (a) Has there been thought put into IEP department where IEP's get written by highly skilled professionals to ensure to families the quality of the IEP being written is the best and most appropriate?

A: Yes, working with Bonnie in terms of 2E identification and making sure we are looking at ALP students who might have disabilities and students in SPED who could qualify for ALP. WHISK which is often given for profiling for identification, there are things that can identify who are 2E. Working with ALP teachers for referrals to SPED.

- (i) All SPED teachers are qualified to write IEP goals. New IEP has additional training not just for the new doc but also for training on goals
- (ii) Looking at educational benefit overall and how all staff can collaborate
- (iii) Ongoing training for staff on new IEP and how to implement it
- (iv) A- certified special educator to get the ball rolling sooner than later...teacher should learn who to reach out to, team of people at each school

vii) **Q:** Staffing question – OT and PT staff for their daughter were contract employees and relationship did not have continuity. In house experts would be preferred for students who are deaf. More transparency of who the specialists are and if they will travel with students as a part of their team or if they are contract based. This transparency would be very helpful.

A: looking for this but need to use contract employees right now. District has contracted with constellation for a number of years, and it is not a quick process to change. Multi-year process to get the appropriate staff and out of contracts, working with the district for what is best.

viii) **Q:** A literacy specialist joined to get a standard for MTSS. It would be great if literacy specialists got updates and could give feedback about how the process is going. Stakeholder input- does that include literacy and math specialists?

A: MTSS manual is the process, not guidelines. Have all levels as part of committee. Will have Dr. G share with his staff updates

- (a) **Q:** Did staff get chosen, or did they apply?

A: He worked with administrators to make sure all different roles were covered.

- (b) Karen Hirsch - For those that do want to reach out or have additional questions, I will always make myself available to chat or ensure that questions are being shared - you can reach me at karen_hirsh@greenwich.k12.ct.us

ix) **Q:** Assistive Technology – what will that look like?

A: Hired Assistive Tech specialist – Megan White

- (1) Available, but not currently utilized in the district
- (2) Working on getting what is in the district up and running
- (3) Identification for students for their needs (middle and HS are focus right now)
- (4) Ongoing prof. dev., working with school principles to ensure students have access to the assistive tech in their classes
- (5) Once that is up and going will evaluate the elementary schools

9) Adjournment