

SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

A meeting of the Region 14 Special Education Committee was held on Tuesday, September 7, 2010 in the Region 14 Central Office Conference Room, 5 Minortown Road, Woodbury, CT.

The following members of the Board of Education were present: Gary Suslavich, Linda Bulvanowski, Board Chairman Stephen Sordi and Committee Chair Pamela Zmek. George Bauer joined the meeting at 7:15. Deborah Corsico joined the meeting at 7:18.

The following members of the Region 14 Administration were present: Dr. Robert Cronin, Superintendent and Jay Hubelbank, Director of Fiscal Services.

Also in attendance was Diane Stockwell, representative from Region 14 SEPTA.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 by Pamela Zmek.

The following matters were discussed:

- A schedule was established for the remainder of the 2010 calendar year. Meetings will be held as follows: Monday, Oct 18th; Monday, Nov 15th; Monday, Dec 20th. All meetings will take place at 6:30 p.m. in the Region 14 Central Office Conference Room. Any cancellations due to inclement weather will be posted on the Region 14 Board of Education website. Members of the Committee may be reached through the Board of Education website.
- Dr. Cronin announced that Kimberly Culkin, had begun her position as Region 14 Director of Special Services on Friday, September 3, 2010. Because she has been with the Region only 2 days, he felt it appropriate to excuse her from the meeting this evening, which was unanimously agreed with. Dr. Cronin is pleased Ms. Culkin has joined Region 14 and conducted a building tour with her to introduce her to faculty and staff. The Committee looks forward to welcoming her at the next meeting.
- Diane Stockwell stated that at present SEPTA does not have regularly scheduled meetings. She expressed her hope that more families will become involved with SEPTA this year. She stated that in past years SEPTA scheduled speakers and fundraisers, however, they were not well attended. It is her belief it may be advantageous to have a contact person at each of the four schools to address questions and issues relating to SEPTA at each level. Dr. Cronin offered his help if needed and suggested Ms. Stockwell may gain insight from Ms. Culkin as to how SEPTA can raise awareness and participation in the Region.
- Ms. Stockwell feels SEPTA's current main concern is the need for increased consistency between schools with regard to staff. She is hopeful that additional

training and professional development will help maintain consistency. Dr. Cronin has discussed this issue with Ms. Culkin, who has tentative plans to provide a workshop on IDEA and related issues. He will also discuss future professional development opportunities for paraprofessionals and teachers. Dr. Cronin stated that the district has 40 hours of consultation available planned with the High Needs Program this year.

- Another area of concern is ensuring smooth transitions as students with special needs move from the primary grades through high school. Mr. Hubelbank stated that this issue has been looked at in terms of budget and staffing and he will revisit that in the future.

- With regard to oversight within the Special Services Department, Mr. Sordi stated that he and Dr. Cronin had recently discussed the benefits of hiring an independent audit team to evaluate the Region's special education program. Mrs. Zmek stated that many school districts commission these types of audits on a regular basis, say every 5 or 7 years, and that they seem to be generally beneficial since they evaluate such things as staffing concerns, compliance with legal issues, whether the district is on target with regard to identification of special needs students and appropriateness of direct and related services. Mr. Sordi stated it would provide a "checks and balances" component for the District. Mr. Suslavich offered that the town of Darien recently conducted a similar audit and placed a video of the presentation on its Board of Education website. Dr. Cronin reported that he has checked with several agencies that perform such audits and learned the following:
 - Phi Delta Kappa, Bloomington, IN – has sent a written proposal, a copy of which will be provided by Dr. Cronin. He believes their quote was approximately \$30,000.

 - State Education Resource Center (SERC), Middletown, CT – will perform an audit based on specific questions provided to them by a district. SERC does 2-10 days of fact gathering, depending on the size of the district. The cost is \$1,000/day per auditor.

 - Education Connection (EdConn), Litchfield, CT – facilitates independent audits, but outsources to another agency. It is Dr. Cronin's opinion that we should set aside any proposal from EdConn and contract directly with an auditing agency, rather than through a third party. The Committee voiced its agreement with him.

 - University of Connecticut School of Education – Dr. Cronin has contacted the School of Education which has two retired professors on staff who conduct audits for \$1,000 per day. He is waiting to hear back from them to gain more specific information.

- The Cambridge Group, offices worldwide, but has a regional office in New York– this agency generally works with districts not meeting AYP, but will provide audits of any district. They will be sending more detailed information to Dr. Cronin. He believes their cost is in the \$30,000 range.
- Dr. Cronin will find out how long it takes to receive a report once the agency has completed its fact-gathering. While in the district, agency auditors speak with staff, conduct a review of IEPs, visit classrooms and review district policies. Reports provide both qualitative and quantitative data.
- Dr. Cronin also suggested establishing a committee to review out of district placements. He worked with this model while Superintendent in Naugatuck and found it helpful. He explained that the committee might consist of members of the PPT team, student’s parents, as well as the Superintendent, a Board member, Director of Special Services, and the child’s teacher. The committee would answer such questions as: What have we tried with this student? Can we provide the same services in our district? Why not? What other placement options have we explored? Dr. Cronin felt that this process not only facilitates communication, but generates better understanding of the process.
- Mr. Sordi suggested it might be beneficial to have Ms. Culkin do a short presentation in the near future to the Committee on the special education process. Dr. Cronin felt this was a good idea and would see if she could present a “case study” at a future meeting.
- The question was raised as to how much testing was performed out of district, and Mr. Hubelbank stated most is done in-house, however highly specialized testing is outsourced. He stated that the Special Services Department represents 20% of the District’s budget.
- The Committee thanked Mrs. Stockwell and Dr. Cronin for their input. The next meeting will take place on Monday, October 18, 2010 at 6:30.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:21.

Respectfully Submitted,

Pamela Lmek

Special Education Committee Chair
Region 14 Board of Education