

Special Education Parent Partnership Committee Meeting Minutes

10/29/2021

1:00-2:00

Members Present: Corinna Graner, Molly Meyer, Kristi Flesher, Aaron Ruhland, Ali Howe, Ericka Ronnings, Jessica Butcher, Erin Murray, Erica Swenson, Emily Bremner Forbes, Aimee Libby, Robin Gipson, Jillian Froehlich, & guest Michelle Swenson

The meeting began with an introduction of new members along with a reintroduction of returning members.

Emily Bremner Forbes began by recognizing Kristi Flesher and all her years of leadership for Orono SEPPC. Kristi was the Director of Special Services for 17 years and part of the SEPPC for almost just as long. Kristi expressed gratitude for being able to be a part of such a wonderful group for so long.

Emily continued by referencing the group's mission statement and reiterating that this is first and foremost a confidential space where parents and staff can ask questions or offer guidance and understanding. All districts must have a SEAC (special education advisory committee) and we want to have a space where parents and staff can discuss their experiences. Emily pointed out that this is not a place where you come to resolve individual issues, rather, it is for giving each other guidance and understanding in a broader sense. The SEPPC is a collaborative group with representation from all levels (elementary/secondary.)

Next, Michelle Swenson introduced the Unified program and its student chair and vice chair. Michelle is a high school math teacher at OHS and the Unified advisor. The Unified program does extend to the Middle School and in certain activities, the elementary schools. Michelle shared that there has been an increase in athlete participation at the secondary level within Orono. The Unified group recently transitioned back to in-person meetings and practices. In-person meetings have helped to get everyone involved and feel connected.

The student chair and vice chair talked about what the club meetings usually involve; arts & crafts, ice breakers, general announcements, new campaign announcements, etc. The flag football season has just ended which was a big draw to the program. The Unified statewide flag football tournament was canceled because of Covid but Orono held their own. Any and all sports within Unified are led by Orono students. For example, during flag football, the Orono varsity football players were the coaches. Unified had around 50-60 students this fall for flag football which resulted in 4 different teams.

Some of the upcoming ideas/activities within Unified are as follows; dance, bowling, basketball, floor hockey. In October, Unified celebrated Unity Week which is usually the week before MEA. Students were asked to wear their "BE KIND" shirts or orange shirts. There were also signs & activities to support Unity Day throughout the district. This year Unified will participate in a Polar Plunge. A few years ago, the Special Olympics MN made a mobile unit in order to bring the Polar Plunge straight to the District. Orono will be utilizing the mobile Polar Plunge this year.

The Unified advisor, Michelle Swenson, went on to explain that if a student with an intellectual disability is in 6th grade-transition age, they can participate in Unified activities. In the past, elementary students have participated as "young athletes & Unified juniors." Michelle explained that within Unified, she handles the paperwork while the kids do the planning. Michelle reminded everyone that members must attend Unified meetings, not just sporting events. Unified has a roster limit and so students need to earn their spot by showing commitment to the group.

Next, Michelle asked if there were any questions pertaining to Unified. Parents within SEPPC took this opportunity to show appreciation for Unified and its student chair and vice chair. Michelle added that Bucky

Mieras has appealed to the state of MN for Unified to become an official state sport. Bucky wants the MN state high school league to recognize the Unified group. Minnesota is one of very few states where Unified is not recognized, but there will be an upcoming discussion within the MN state high school league.

Next, Corinna gave a rundown of all new staff within Special Services. Members of the new staff at Orono include: Jessica Butcher (elementary school psychologist), Katy Crofutt (covering a maternity leave within SE), Mallory Purdy (covering a maternity leave within IS), Anne Thillman (SE health clerk), Mia Hansen (elementary behavior support specialist), Jessie Schuett (special education teacher at HS), Jody King (transition teacher at HS), Taylor Fellers (special education teacher at MS), Bill Rosati (covering maternity leave within MS), Molly Meyer (special education coordinator), Corinna Graner (director of special education), Heather Sander (MS special education para), Elyse Vandersteen (MS special education para), Madeline Frost (MS special education para), Sarah Dehkes (HS special education para), Rosie Willenbring (transition para), Jessi Lindquist (health clerk), Eric Thoerner (floating school nurse sub).

The group continued on to discuss how Orono parents can find out what activities & clubs are open/occurring at each building. The group was shown the toggle bar on the left hand side of the Orono website where "Peach Jar" is accessible at all levels and "athletics & activities" is accessible at the secondary level. This continues to be the most updated way they would know of events/clubs. Ericka Ronnings added that the community ed brochure is a great resource as well.

Corinna concluded the meeting by thanking the group and reminding all members to reach out if they have questions, concerns, or need support. Corinna continued by thanking everyone for their partnership.

Corinna & Molly shared that we will reach out for topics for future meetings that parents might be interested via a google form before the next meeting.

Our next meeting is Friday, December 10th at 1pm via google meet.