

Greenwich Special Education Advisory Council Meeting Minutes

January 10, 2023

Zoom meeting, 6:30pm

A. Attendance

- a. Andi Cosby, Caroline Lerum, Dr. Stacey Heiligenthaler, Abby Anders, Jen Kutai, Audra O'Donovan, Beth Forger, Dawn Zimmerman, Eugene Matejek, Jenn Donat, Jenn Socci, Jennifer Dunn, Joe Baynes, Joe Kelly, John Hamel Jr., Julia Reisch, Karen Hirsh, Karyn Perchard, Kathy Walker, Leah Zilich, Lindsey Eisenstein, Maya Feldman, Michael Mercanti-Anthony, Robin Baldwin, Sandra Sosa, Theresa Fox, Virginia Plath-Kelly

B. Welcome and Opening Remarks from Chairperson

- a. Caroline Lerum is acting chair for tonight's meeting

C. Welcome to new SEAC members and introductions

D. Public Comment

- a. No public comment noted at this time

E. Approval of Meeting Minutes for 11/15/22

- a. Motion to approve – Jen Kutai
- b. Dawn Zimmerman second

F. BOE comments on last year's SEAC annual report and recommendations

- a. John Hamel had to leave at 7pm, so giving committee update on Enrichment Committee now
 - i. John's audio was not working
- b. Introductions of BOE members in attendance
 - i. Karen Hirsch – 3rd year on BOE, been involved with SpEd advocacy for many years. 2 children, one has graduated, and one is in the HS, both with learning differences. Been involved with SEAC since inception. Thanked new members for joining.
 - ii. Michael Mercanti- Anthony – 2nd year on BOE, founding member of SEAC, 2 sons, one special ed out of district on an IEP and another just in Kindergarten at Riverside.
 - iii. Joe Kelly – Chair of BOE and has learning differences himself, also has one child who went through GPS and one at the HS.
- c. Comments on SEAC annual report
 - i. Karen Hirsch – as members of BOE they read through the reports and then at the retreat (coming up 1st Thursday of Feb) discuss their questions and things they have heard from the community. A year and a half into the audit, and they estimated 5 years to get to the recommendations and feel that is ahead of schedule. Feel the questions BOE members have been asking are inline with the recommendations that were made in the annual report.
 - 1. Dr. H has been reporting to BOE and making good progress. Mike and I are always available to you in between meetings if you have questions or concerns, or not getting a response from individuals.
 - ii. Mike Mercanti-Anthony – For too long SpEd families didn't have a voice in the district, and know how important this report is to our community. SEAC every

year giving an annual report every year, and it is so important and tremendous. We know the building topics have been in the headlines, and not SpEd, which is sometimes frustrating. They are making sure SpEd remains reoccurring on the agenda, and Dr. H reports regularly on progress. Last year's report had the section on MTSS and the other on the PPT. Our role is not for everything to perfect, but rather to make sure things are progressing and working well.

1. Other colleagues send their regrets, a lot going on right now, so representing them and will report back.
 - iii. Joe Kelly – Karen and Mike are great partners and advocates for SpEd. The BOE is passionate to make the best of this situation as possible.
 - iv. Contact info. Karen_Hirsh@greenwich.k12.ct.us, mj_mercanti-anthony@greenwich.k12.ct.us, joe_kelley@greenwich.k12.ct.us
- d. Comment: Audra O'Donovan – Thanked the BOE. Learning and looking for a good timeline. SEAC presented the report in May, meeting now, and the other meeting is in Feb. How do we make a schedule, so that once we present in May, should we schedule to meet in September? We want to be able to report back to the SEAC members in a timelier and more stream lined manner.
- i. Karen Hirsch – why her and Mike are at all the meetings, to be available to us and answer questions. At the beginning of the school year we can set up a beginning of the school year meeting with them (or current BOE reps) on how to best work together as liaisons.
 - ii. Mike Mercanti-Anthony – Perhaps the cadence of the SEAC meetings might need an adjustment. If report is given the end of the year. Summer is rough, as is the start of the school year. A report follow-up meeting in October as a standing item for SEAC, and invite administrators, before we form the new committees.
- e. Comment: Jen Kutai – State recommended question about where we stand. Are we required to meet the state recommend requirements?
- i. Mike Mercanti-Anthony – state passed legislation around a widened curriculum on science and reading. State said every district has to align to certain criteria. This officially came out before winter break. GPS is working to see how to align with the state approval plan. Working on that right now. “Sold a Story” podcast is a must to listen to if you haven't. It is awful, but very educational about where we were and where we have come.
 - ii. Karen Hirsch – they received the report the morning of their last meeting, so this is being addressed and an ongoing discussion.
- f. Comment: Jenn Donat – teacher at Cos Cob, giving thanks for co-teaching classroom program. It is going incredibly well.
- i. Joe Kelly – thanked for the kind words.
 - ii. Caroline Lerum – She has also heard positive feedback, and parents asking for when this would expand to other neighborhood schools.
 - iii. Mike Mercanti – Anthony – Plan is to expand from K and 1st to expand at Cos Cob into 2nd and 3rd next year.

- iv. Dr. Heiligenthaler – They want to expand to other schools, but don't want to grow things too fast. Implemented a lot quickly this year and want to continue to do things really well and grow appropriately.
- v. Karen Hirsh – a lot of what they have done is coming from the ARP funding that the district received and looking to how to fund these things and being able to grow them.
- vi. Beth Forger – spent time this week in the co-taught classroom with Karen Vitti, and just second how great it is going.

G. Updates from Dr. Heiligenthaler

- a. Thanked everyone for partnership.
- b. Action Plan is posted on district website, and when there are updates, they are posted to the GPS website regularly. [Find it here.](#)
 - i. Will report at the next BOE meeting on these updates. If you have concerns, please reach out to Karen Hirsh or Mike Mercanti-Anthony before then.
 - ii. Staff have really jumped in with these new initiatives and improvements, as well as administrators.
- c. A lot of professional development
 - i. CT-SEDS is still what occupies most of the staff time, and biggest struggle of the year, but professional development is still moving forward for special ed staff and speech and language staff in K-8.
 - ii. Taking advantage of Wilson training through the state.
 - iii. Working on additional reading training to add another layer of support to our students. Supporting vocabular in K-2.
 - iv. PINE ([Program for Inclusion and Neurodiversity Education](#)) being used in Elementary level out of NYU, 4-week accelerator program identifying strengths and weaknesses at the school and identify staff development that can be implemented through the PINE program. Full access to this NYU resource library, virtual office hours with NYU staff trained in areas of inclusion. Multi-layered approach, each school developed their plan on how to use these resources over the next several years.
 - v. Autism and Executive Functioning professional development being implemented.
 - vi. Working to support paraprofessionals and what they are doing in the classroom.
- d. Making great strides in supporting our students even despite the aggravation of CT-SEDS.
- e. Compliance was at 72% now at 95.7% for compliance of IEPs. Not perfect but making major progress.
- f. Inventory of all tests the district owns this summer
 - i. Grouped tests for different uses and made that available to staff, so they know what they have to work with

H. Committee Updates

- a. Enrichment – Caroline Lerum on behalf of John Hamel
 - i. Looking for motivational speakers for Winter and Spring Workshops
 - 1. Winter Workshop – Anxiety

- a. Looking for a mental health panel with GPS social workers and psychologists end of January or February
 - 2. Spring Workshop – looking for someone with a disability who is successful
 - a. Steven Hinkle is someone considering
 - 3. Fall Workshop - UDL
 - 4. Possibly Shelly Moore
 - a. Understanding UDL and how it affects creating effective supports, accommodations, modifications
 - b. She is a sought after teacher, researcher, consultant and storyteller and she has worked with school districts and community organizations through the US and Canada.
- b. Consistency – Audra O’Donovan
 - i. Variations in
 - 1. Program resources
 - 2. Turnover
 - 3. Outplacement
 - 4. IEE’s
 - ii. Next meeting is January 24th
- c. Behavior Intervention – Caroline Lerum
 - i. Shared tenets:
 - 1. Behavior is a form of communication
 - 2. Kids do well if they can/Stress behavior is not misbehavior
 - 3. Kids deserve to feel safe
 - 4. Restraint/Seclusion is traumatizing
 - 5. Adult behaviors influence a child’s behavior
 - 6. There are no bad kids
 - 7. Training/consistency is essential across the district
 - 8. If we are in crisis management, we are too late.
 - ii. 4 areas of focus- consistency, restraint/seclusion, training, prevention
- d. Nominating
 - i. Looking for someone to support the nominating work with Kathy Walker.

I. Adjournment 8:01pm