

School Council Minutes
November 13, 2017

In attendance:

Mark Wilson, Principal
Michael Schaffer, ELL teacher
Michael Newby, STEM Teacher
Jesse Malloy, Geography teacher
Sarah Cortese, ELA teacher
Joy Jordan, Parent
Kim Robbins, Parent
Doreen Escher, Parent

Unavailable to attend:

Emily Milan, Parent

The meeting opened with school council members reviewing and unanimously approving the minutes from its meeting on October 23, 2017.

The meeting continued with school council members receiving a briefing on the school's response to shifting expectations with regard to procedures for identifying students who may be eligible under Section 504 (§504), a federal statute that prohibits discrimination based upon a disability.

Under §504, a disability is defined as “any student who has a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such student's major life activities, has a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment.” When a student meets this definition, a §504 plan may be designed that describes how a student's specific needs are met through accommodations and/or other services so any barriers that exist as a result of the disability can be addressed.

Within the broader educational community, legal opinion, when coupled with recommendations from the Office of Civil Rights for an inclusive approach in this work, have led schools to turn Individualized Healthcare Plans into 504 plans.

Such shifts can result in an exponential increase in the number of students identified as “physically or mentally impaired”, a corresponding increase in staffing / time dedicated to the process, and a reduction in services to students as counselors spend more time chairing §504 meetings and less time counselling students. By way of example, in 2016-17 there were seven (7) students at MRMS on 504 plans. Under the shifting expectations, in 2017-18 there would be fifty-two (52) students at MRMS on 504 plans.

At MRMS, the administration identified seven criteria to use when determining whether a student's “physical or mental impairment” is sufficiently impactful so accommodations and/or other services are necessary to help the student make effective educational progress. These criteria are:

- degree of severity of disability
- degree of complexity of disability
- risk of a medical event at school
- severity of potential consequences of a medical event at school

- frequency of implementation of required actions/services to attend and function at school
- need for accommodations/services in a classroom due to disability
- student's classroom performance in all subject areas, including Physical Education

To date, MRMS has sent written notification of these criteria to thirty-seven (37) households where students have a history of impairment as a result of allergy and/or asthma, and only three (3) of those households have requested a §504 meeting. Mark Wilson will continue to send notifications to households with other histories of impairment.

School council member Joy Jordan inquired whether other schools within the district were following the same procedures as MRMS, and Mark Wilson shared that the other schools were not following these procedures. Mark also promised to bring the matter to the attention of the Monomoy Administrative Team (MAT) in the near future (it was placed on the 11/28 MAT agenda and discussed there).

The meeting continued with a discussion of the FY19 School Budget. School council members received, reviewed, and discussed various line items within the school's budget, and then voted unanimously in favor of the following motion: "For the FY19 MRMS budget to maintain existing staffing levels and ADD a 1.0 FTE counselor and a 0.6 FTE Reading Teacher to address identified student needs." Consequently, on November 17th, Mark Wilson made a formal, written request to Scott Carpenter and Katie Iernio requesting MRMS staffing be adjusted by 1.6 FTE for next year.

In making the motion, the School Council members made specific reference to the information that was provided to Monomoy Regional School Committee during the August update on the School Improvement Plan, which the school committee voted unanimously to support at that time.

The meeting adjourned at 4:30 PM, with the next school council meeting set for Monday, December 18th at 3:30 PM.