

Greenwich Special Education Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

March 7, 2023

Zoom Meeting, 6:30pm

- A. Attendance: Jenni Reynolds, Andi Cosby, Dr. Stacey Heiligenthaler, Beth Forger, Eugene Matejek, Jeannine Tanton, Leah Zilich, Mike Mercanti- Anthony, Maya Feldman, Kathy Walker, Priya Easwaran, Audra O'Donovan, Abby Anders, Pedro Campos, Joe Baynes, Virginia Path-Kelly, Theresa Fox, John Hamel, Lori Mancini, Yaneli Avila, Jenn Donat, Courtney Powers, Leah Thornton, Jennifer Kutai, Daniel Katz, Julia Reisch, Lori, Annabella Jucius
- B. Welcome and Opening Remarks from Chairperson
 - a. Thank you to Danielle Polizzi, Ashley Lawson, Joan O'Day, Jessica Jagde and Meredith Odinak for volunteering their time and sharing their expertise in the mental health panel last month. Please take a moment to look at the handout and padlet shared from the mental health presentation last month.
 - i. Padlet link -
https://padlet.com/kristen_mulhearn/community-supports-6of9rzzo7s1w1j66
 - 1. Really wonderful resource for educators and parents
 - b. Caroline Lerum is stepping down from SEAC, this leaves an open position for Vice Chair. Parents please consider if you could be a good fit for this role.
 - c. Want to provide more information in SEAC meetings going forward, and will be adding short spotlights on various programs and resources within the district starting with next meeting where we are planning to learn more about Second Step. If you have any programs or resources that you'd like to suggest for these spotlights, please let the executive board know.
 - d. Creating a google form for all SEAC voting/alternate members, if you are not a member of a committee, but have feedback you want to contribute to the committees toward the annual report. Look out for that in the next week.
- C. Public Comment - None
- D. Approval of Meeting Minutes for 1/10/22
 - a. Motion to Approve - 1)Abby Anders 2)Audra O'Donovan. Unanimously approved
- E. Membership Updates and Proposed By-Law Changes
 - a. In order to clarify the purpose of the SEAC changes recommended are
 - i. Article II/3 change Greenwich Board of Education instead of Greenwich Public School District

- ii. Article III
 - 1. Section 1/c, clarify by adding “and communication and collaboration with the Superintendent and Chief Officer of Special Education and Supports.”
 - 2. Section 2/h: added teachers/related service providers to parents/guardians
 - iii. Article VII: Section 1/3 change board members shall be eligible to serve two (2) additional two (2) year terms in the same position, rather than one (1) additional two (2) year terms. This would be an optional additional term to provide consistency/stability to the council, and only an option if you are in “Good Standing”.
 - iv. Motion to Approve - 1)Abby Anders 2)Audra O’Donovan. Unanimously approved.
- b. Open the floor for nominations
- i. No nominations
 - ii. Dawn Zimmerman had agreed to take over as Vice Chair for the remainder of this school year. She could not be here tonight, but did provide in writing of her intent.
 - 1. Motion to Approve - 1)Audra O’Donovan, 2)JeannineTanton
 - iii. One voting member parent position is also now open
 - 1. Two parents in non-voting positions - Pedro Campos and Raquel Sosa
 - 2. Pedro and Raquel agreed for Raquel to move up
 - 3. Do not need to vote per by-laws. Raquel Sosa is now a voting member.
- F. Updates from Dr. Heiligenthaler
- a. Earlier the executive board forwarded questions. Will read and then can take additional questions.
 - i. We hear from administrators that the meetings at each other’s schools are helpful. Is there room to expand this to teachers and related service providers?
 - 1. Right now I am focused on administrators. Pulling teachers out of the classroom is a really difficult process, especially with substitute shortages and covid quarantines. Last couple of months at the elementary level, for professional development the SES staff are meeting together in mixed groups. Sharing meetings for middle school, the middle school staff did come up to the high school. Trying to get those relationships where they can. Not a

formal month to month, but looking for opportunities for staff to get together and discuss what is happening at other schools.

Would like to do more, but easing back into being in person.

- ii. What is the plan for Universal Design for Learning (UDL) implementation? Who is the go to in the district/in each building? Who is the expert? Will there be coaching in each building?
 1. Not straightforward, very layered. Last year we did professional development about what UDL is, this year we are trying to be strategic for implementation. Looking at tier 1 MTSS and see what is being done. Weekly meetings on how interventions are being structured. At elementary level looking at NYU Pine program and how we support neurodiversity. Looking not just at autism, but how all students learn differently. Each school develops their own plan for how they are sharing with teachers. Coming from a deficit model. Looking at Pine and UDL, how do we create an environment for all our learners?
 - a. Maya Fledman shared that what stood out to her is a lens of acceptance and understanding. Developing programs to support neurodiversity we are wanting to work on.
- iii. What is the plan for expansion of co-teaching and the unique learner program?
 1. We are not expanding our co-taught classroom out of Cos Cob at this point. Want to make sure the new programming we put in place this year, we improve next year and integrate it mindfully into what we are doing. Evaluating what is working and what is not working, and tweaking at all levels, and improving before any drastic change.
- iv. Still big concerns about differences between schools. Do you have a spreadsheet of all the training of all the staff at each school? We understand that some programming is left up to individual school's leadership. When it's doing well, who's watching this? Do we consider bringing this to other schools? When it's not doing well, who oversees this?
 1. Joe Baynes is tracking in detail on a massive excel sheet, including the training from years past. Constantly updating the list to know who is getting what training, and keep moving everyone forward and know who has received each training.

2. Trying to balance how much time a teacher would be out and services not provided, and prioritizing getting training without overwhelming the staff. Each school also has their own training related to their schools initiative.
3. Also working with the paraprofessionals to make sure they are getting the training that can benefit their role.
- v. How and when is it determined which general ed and which special ed teachers are assigned to co-teaching each year?
 1. Cos Cob- same will stay, for any new position, people apply, interview and are selected.
 2. Middle School- many established that will stay, always look at best placements if we feel things can be improved and what the needs of the students are.
 3. High School- co-teaching teams this year, surveys are out to see what teams are working, if they want to remain where they are, and taking that all into account.
 4. A lot of navigating with staff.
- vi. Are all teachers trained in co-teaching?
 1. Focus is working on the partnership within the co-teaching team. As we do training it is with the teams.
- vii. If it is a new team each year, how do you work to shorten the learning curve of teaching together/potentially teaching a new grade level, etc?
 1. We evaluate how the teams are doing, and work together to determine the best fits to keep, and who we should rematch.
- viii. When will the SPED annual report be shared with the BOE?
 1. Have felt really supported for the work being done, but don't want to just take our word for it. Will have the same team who did the evaluation come in and do an overview of where we are, and report out to the BOE after that.

Parent Question

About the para, are there plans to include paras in the co-taught classroom at Cos Cob? To help with lunch, recess, etc.?

No, working with the building staff to support when a teacher is there for support, but not using the model. If a student requires a para they would not be recommended to this program.

G. Committee Updates

- a. Enrichment - John Hamel

- i. We had an accepted speaker, Judy Heumann, who unfortunately passed away unexpectedly over the weekend.
 - ii. Have a tentative speaker penciled in, Dr. Jenna Rufo. Also have other leads waiting to hear back on. Looking for the program to be in late April or early May.
- b. Behavior - Jenni Reynolds
 - i. Deep dives into consistency strategies, staff training, implementation - working on ways to make recommendations to improve.
 - ii. May roll over this topic area to next year's committees, but we can decide this next meeting.
- c. Consistency - Audra O'Donovan
 - i. Next meeting next Tuesday, March 14th at 7pm - Discussing outplacements and % of those with IEPs. This will be the last meeting and then we will work on the report.

H. Adjournment

- a. Next meeting is May 16 at 6:30pm