Special Education Advisory Committee

October 8, 2024

Cole Library 6:30 pm

Zoom (feed began late due to technical issue)

Minutes

Meeting called to order.

Present: Molly Fridley (SEAC Chair), Matthew Murray (SEAC Chair) Dr. Patricia Page (EGHS Principal), Neil Marcaccio (MTSS Director), Dr. Brian Ricca (Superintendent), Clare Cecil-Karb (School Committee)

Introduction to the SEAC - The group focuses on policy and procedure in the district

Recent SEAC events include advocating for increased staffing, IEP training and professional development.

SEAC updates:

The SEAC has access to polling mechanisms and to put two members on each school's School Improvement team.

The district will benefit from a more unified approach to school improvement teams. SEAC can begin polling to garner evidence for suggesting priorities

SEAC Leadership suggests creation of Ad Hoc sub-group meetings to try to focus on specific topics and use skill sets that they have.

SEAC can set goals and then use community membership to implement and then present findings to larger SEAC committee and then have those findings sent to larger SC.

Possible Ad-Hoc Groups:

Providing budgetary support- to advocate for increased funding from the town.

Improving digital presence- digital destination that is a SEAC URL where latest schedule etc.

Planned social meetings- daytime or evening community meetings. Community of shared experiences. This more information opportunity will fill a heretofore unfilled gap- opportunity to speak freely about personal experiences. Opportunity to offer advice and counsel to one another.

Plan: Community gathering Wed Nov 13 5pm Felicia's (closes at 6)

SEAC will advertise on listserv.

School Improvement Teams:

SIT members- new membership comes up in the new school year. SEAC can assign two members to each school's SIT team.

Pat Page describes- across all SIT teams the achievement gap is a focus these priorities are dictated by RIDE data along with attendance. The SIT teams will add a third priority which is specific to each school's SIT team.

Details per Dr. Page- HS SIT Traditionally meets 3rd Wednesday of the month- around 3pm. In HS the SIT team includes students. Other schools don't include students along with legislatively required folks.

Matt's experience at Hanaford- first three meetings were dedicated to discussion and planned action regarding playground equipment. Lack of SEAC representation made it clear that we need representation on the SIT teams to make sure that this work is meaningful.

Educator accountability act is what created the SIT teams.

Matt points out that a lot of parents have interest in SpEd but SEAC representation needed to drive the meetings toward these topics.

Each SIT team member should have a student in the school. SEAC and Mr. Marcaccio will plan for recruitment, garner interest and contact principals to coordinate.

Policy issues:

RI currently allocates special education funding with “poverty” as a proxy for the Special Education population. This means that in higher income communities such as East Greenwich, state funding is not appropriately matched to need.

SEAC has written to ask that Special Education funding be aligned with the special education students population.

SEAC received responses from legislators: Bridget Valverde, Justine Caldwell, Evan S. - inviting talk about introducing legislation to change the funding strategy. Potential idea for ad hoc committee.

Call for input- legislation, digital presence, SIT teams.

Families of students with disabilities- with SEAC membership as priority.

Recruiting happened last year- two year term.

Will continue to bring this to members.

Director’s Update:

Neil apologizes and suggests we add another meeting to make up for limitations of this meeting.

Staffing- we are very close to fully staffed under the student services umbrella. Only a few open positions- all para support roles. Have been able to onboard a double digit number of paras over summer. Have had an influx of great staff members. Onboarded teachers that have been successful.

New unified programming at the high school- content classes that typical students take as electives and students with disabilities take as academic classes.

Bridge program at Frenchtown. A hybrid of a life skills and usual programming. Meaningful and increased inclusion for students with significant needs. Bridge program at 3-5 and middle school levels are planned.

Have launched 48 hour advanced IEP share- a mandate in the district that all IEPs will be shared with families 48 hours in advance. Along with that notice comes a letter from SS with information about the process. Links to documents that go through each element of IEP - present levels of performance, goals and objectives etc.

Initial evaluation, three year evaluation, — all information that should ideally be housed in SEAC digital presence.

Planning for earlier surveys (mini) put out along the year. First will be about the budget.

Feedback from families about where they see priorities and needs and their own children’s needs. This will be used for budgeting and forecasting for the next year.

Resources for the new school year.

All of these things have been in process for the past two years.

Dr. Ricca offers “Kudos to Neil” - making this work and finally will be getting a new director.

Mini surveys can highlight past collaborative accomplishments - an example is the 48 hour IEP rule which came through SEAC and was shepherded by Neil.

Will see new protocols during IEPs- Keys to education -
Create robust agendas, identifying individuals with roles as well as classification.
Sometimes IEP meetings can feel like win or lose and this is about consensus and empowering teams and families to work through problem solving strategies.
504 meetings will also be impacted.
School counselors and SpEd staff will be trained.
Behavioral goals and plans- district is doing excellent behavior improvement plans linked to IEP goals around behavior. But need to do associated analysis for these plans.

Assistant director of Student Services has been interviewed and will be hired- announcement coming in the next few weeks.
Beginning at the end of month- Mr. Marcaccio will hold office hours - one early AM and one PM- virtual format. Will happen monthly throughout the year.

Discussion of topic- there have been questions from families about alternative learning plans through the department of education… for kids who may have plans to drop out of HS at 16. GED program- students can receive services through IEP and also have concurrent GED training. They are still EG students in alternative placement. This is also an opportunity for students who need to get to their next educational step. For instance technical training or college.
The number of colleges that accept GED testing is increasing.

Attendance - the more flexible we can make education the more impact with attendance. This is an issue for kids who are being bullied or have social issues… Creating opportunities to exit the system in a way that feels suitable and planned via GED attainment vs leaving school with no evidence of having completed something.

Some of our students who are in need of academic support do very well in GED programs because they are more goal-directed, time limited and also happen in a different space.

Other options for high school equivalency - this partnership with NE tech is another avenue. Conversations with similarly situated families. One of the challenges is that families do not know that options are available outside of traditional high school/graduation. These opportunities advertised over time.

Identified need: Parents and students need more of a long-term view of the school journey. Understanding what IEPs and special education looks like across the school district…

This may be solved with help from a new web presence possibly to include an interactive vertical graphing where you might be able to click on areas and get more information on each piece of information. Mr. Marcaccio states that when parents don't have the big picture it is really difficult for them to feel comfortable and secure with the district. A resource that is available now is the Progress Center's virtual training. The progress center has helped SEAC through training in the past and every progress center training document is linked in documents that are handed out.

Plan and Adjournment:

SEAC will add a meeting in December - early in the month- and will make efforts to advertise.

Minutes submitted by Ms. Clare Cecil-Karb