

# **Greenwich Special Education Advisory Council**

## **Minutes**

**September 24, 2024**

**7:00 pm, Zoom**

### **A. Attendance**

- a. SEAC Voting/Alternate Members: Andi Cosby, Alexandra Saltis, Kiera Lewis, Jenni Reynolds, Abby Anders, Lisa Berluti, Mary Callison, Pedro Campos, Jennifer Dunn, Beth Forger, Lauren Hanemann, Don McGuire, Mariana Martin Moreno, Julia Reisch, Sandra Sosa, Veronica Chiavaroli, Laura Lohan
- b. Administration/BOE/Presenters: Stacey Heiligenthaler, Mike Mercanti-Anthony, Karen Hirsch, Rachel Rubin
- c. Community Members: Danielle Polizzi, Eugene Matejek, Harry Burg, Jessica Wieneke, Joe Baynes, Monica Harriss, Susan Diana, Theresa Fox, John Hamel, Leah Zilich, Lindsey Eisenstein

### **B. Welcome and Opening Remarks from Chairperson**

- a. Andi Cosby opened the meeting and introduced the executive committee: Andi Cosby (chair), Kiera Lewis and Alex Saltis (vice-chairs), Jenni Reynolds (secretary)
- b. General overview of SEAC: SEAC formed during COVID, advises BOE on matters pertaining to special education, working committees provide recommendations to BOE each year
- c. Anyone who wants to be on the SEAC mailing list can email [greenwichseac@gmail.com](mailto:greenwichseac@gmail.com) to be added to the list.
- d. The PCG (Public Consulting Group) feedback form is live. Use this form to provide feedback and questions related to the current PCG action plan review.

### **C. Public Comment**

- a. Jenni Reynolds promoted a SEAC presentation in partnership with the Darien SEPAC this Monday September 30 on Postsecondary Education Opportunities for Students with Intellectual Disabilities and Autism. Link to register was put in the zoom chat and sent by email.

### **D. Updates from Dr. Heiligenthaler**

- a. Dr. Heiligenthaler responded to questions sent by the chair/vice-chairs prior to the meeting.
- b. Upcoming PCG review: They are specifically looking at the progress that has been made on the 28 recommendations that they made in their previous review. PCG will be walk throughs, reviewing documents/data and holding focus groups

based on topics laid out in the action plan. They are presenting at the 9/26 BOE meeting.

- i. Karen Hirsch (BOE) mentioned that there will be a focus group for people from SEAC, particularly those involved in the early days of the audit, and that the review will be run independently from the district. PCG will be adding preschool and community connections to their review.
- c. Updates related to the SEAC annual reports: On the Special Education page on GPS website, there is a section on the PCG review that includes BOE presentations and an update on the action plan which includes information addressing SEAC recommendations from past 3 years at the very end of the report.
- d. Primary action items for this school year: Refinement of things we've already implemented or started and going more in depth: Creative Curriculum in Preschool; Diebels implementation, reading programs (eg. V and V), PINE and Bridges (math) in Elementary Schools; Middle school: supported academic lab, Diebels; High School: Executive functioning using SMARTS program in academic lab. Co-teaching at all levels.
- e. Current staff vacancies: Pretty well staffed. One teacher resigned but is being filled by a teacher in district. Are trying to find certified staff to fill long term leaves - close to having staff able to fill that. There are some para vacancies - there is more turnover in this area that is being addressed by Dr. Budd to draw more paras to come and to stay. One vacant position on behavior team, which is a new position. Compared to other districts we are doing well with staffing.
  - i. A question was asked about how many long term leaves: Can think of 3 full year off the top of her head. Short term leaves try to cover from within district.
  - ii. A question about OT vacancies: OT is contracted by Constellation. Unsure if we have any openings. District informs parents of outages the same way as any other provider.
- f. Service provider times are determined by each building. Dr. Heilenthaler and Dr. Jones check the schedule to ensure for lunch/breaks. It is a changing schedule because IEPs change throughout the year.
- g. What services are made up when missed? If student is absent, service is not made up. During course of school year, district looks at about 5 sessions that get missed before looking to make them up (not consecutive). Schools notify parents when there is a provider that will be out for an extended time, when the anticipated return date is. Have to work with HR about this in order to balance parental notification and protect staff privacy. What was the behavior/trauma informed training that the paraprofessionals received? Sometimes administration doesn't know how long someone will be out initially so trying to gather more info before clarifying to parents.
- h. Paras received training at the beginning of the school year. Elementary school paras participate in PINE module trainings. CT contracted with 321 Insight which is a para PD platform. Used state money to facilitate paras use of the platform.

Topics of recent training: Behaviors, working with gen ed teachers, DEI, better understanding IEPs and disability categories.

- i. Feels like we are into a great rhythm to start off this school year. Great transition by all.
- E. SEAC Spotlight: Rachel Rubin, Inclusion Facilitator and Coach
- a. 3rd year as Inclusion Specialist for GPS
  - b. Wears a lot of hats: Overall goal to promote and support staff to implement inclusive practices and foster student growth and independence. Coaches, facilitates, co-planner, PPT team member. Involved with PINE. Works with K-12.
  - c. Pareducator coaching and modeling: How to utilize accessible student materials, appropriate prompting, real-time coaching.
  - d. Co-teaching support: co-plan with teachers to ensure inclusive practices and specially designed instruction. Discussion of best co-teaching model for various lessons. How to differentiate materials for a lesson. Facilitates professional learning sessions: building strong co-teaching partnerships, co-teaching models, learner variability, UDL, etc.
  - e. Special education teachers: Support and ensure that all their students have access to high quality materials and grade level content. Making sure that students with significant support needs in gen ed classes have content related to the topics at their instructional level.
  - f. General education teachers: Support that lessons are designed with all students in mind. Teachers can opt in to working with her, planning/consult hours on IEP indirect service. How to modify assignments/projects, providing accommodations, incorporating assistive technology, how to utilize strategic grouping, etc. Helps teachers know how to use UDL to make lessons accessible in multiple ways to account for learner variability in all classrooms. Also collaborates with district curriculum coordinators in how to differentiate curricular content. Will be working with MS science teachers this fall.
  - g. PINE (Program for Inclusion and Neurodiversity Education): PLTs (PINE leadership teams) - members of staff who lead PINE program at each school. Goal of PINE is to close the gap between needs of students and capacity of educators who support them. Easy ways to utilize UDL framework - she helps to coach and co-plan utilizing the PINE strategies.
  - h. Utilizing AI resources to support UDL. Differentiate text levels, providing choice to students, creating content.
  - i. Professional Development: for paras, co-teachers, gen ed teachers, special educators
  - j. Family Learning Sessions at SESS coffees.
  - k. Questions from group:

- i. Is she the only one doing this? Yes. This was a new position following the PCG report. Focus on building capacity within the staff. No plans for expansion at this time.
- ii. How do the SESS coffees work and what should parents attend? Each school hosts 4 coffees during the course of a school year and they each choose the topic that might be presented. Rachel has come to some, but doesn't do all.
- iii. Can you clarify SDI? SDI = specially designed instruction. It's a means of creating access for students who need more support. Could be methodology, grouping, materials, etc.

F. Discussion and Approval of New Working Committees

- a. Andi Cosby announced that instead of forming new working committee topics this year, that we are going to review the 6 previous SEAC reports and evaluate how things are going in these areas and update/prioritize recommendations. Looking to council on which of the following topics to pair together.
  - i. Eligibility
  - ii. IEP/504 Implementation
  - iii. Behavior
  - iv. Consistency
  - v. Inclusion
  - vi. Staffing
- b. Discussion resulted in having 2 working committees, with both committees reviewing/considering the consistency and staffing reports along with:
  - i. Eligibility and IEP/504 Implementation
  - ii. Inclusion/Behavior
- c. Will also have an enrichment committee to support the current chair (John Hamel) in organizing a spring workshop.
- d. Next step will be to create a signup list for committee work. Committee work is open to all - not just voting members. Committee work is what the council votes on and what is presented to the Board of Ed so a good way to add your voice.

G. Adjournment

- a. Next meeting is Nov 12th at 6:30 via zoom.
- b. Signup for new committee work will be sent out within the next week.