

Greenwich Special Education Advisory Council
Meeting Minutes

November 12, 2024
Zoom meeting, 6:30 pm

A. Attendance

- a. SEAC members: Pedro Campos, Kiera Lewis, Alex Saltis, Mary Callison, Andi Cosby, Christine Zilbich, Jenni Reynolds, Raquel Sosa, Mariana Moreno, Lucy Conrod, Jenn Dunn, Beth Forger, Lisa Berluti, Jenn Donat, Abby Anders, Laura Lohan, Sarah Hyres, Veronica Chiavaroli
- b. Ex Officio members: Karen Hirsch, Stacey Heilgenthaler
- c. Community: Meagan White, Lindsey Eisenstein, Theresa Fox, Harry Burg, Danielle Polizzi, Eugene Matejak, Leah Zilich, Audra O'Donovan, Patricia Klebanov

B. Welcome and Opening Remarks from Co-Chairperson (Alex Saltis)

C. Updates from Dr. Heilgenthaler

- a. Questions that were forwarded ahead of the meeting.
- b. Staffing:
 - i. Closer to filling OT positions. Preschool position at Ham Ave starts tomorrow. Working on covering WMS. Getting closer to supporting Glenville and Ham Ave. Trying to have other OTs provide consulting. Looking for other OTs.
 - ii. When provider is out, district does keep track of services missed. Work on a makeup plan once someone is hired. Work with families and schools to make up during school, after school and during summer.
 - iii. When Special Ed teachers are out, GPS has subs who are able to implement lesson plans. All subs are vetted through HR and rely on HR to guide who can sub and for how long. Subs are not certified in the area they cover but are implementing lessons that are designed by special education teachers.
 - iv. Paraprofessionals: working to fill these. Is a higher turnover position, often an added position throughout the year, so always a need. Moving as fast as they can with interviews. Paras are part of a bargaining unit and district is currently negotiating pay.
 - v. Question on learning centers at GHS. Those are not part of special education. Covered by each house administrator, so they will be able to answer more questions on this. Can also reach out to designated counselors for more help on this.

- vi. Question on program variability for students with IEPs and 504s. Each school has staff/materials to support the students at that particular school. Each student's needs are individual. Some trainings are for all staff (eg reading, math). Some staff are trained further within individual schools if students in that school have more specific needs. Everyone has a certain level of training plus additional training based on needs.
- vii. PCG update. PCG started 2 weeks ago with focus groups across the district. Today and tomorrow they are onsite in schools, getting to as many places and programs as possible. They've also received documentation requested to review. Presentation by PCG will be spring at the latest.
- viii. If you have questions, start with your school and if you have follow up, feel free to reach out to SESS office.

D. Public Comment - none

E. Minutes approval from September meeting.

- a. Voting members received this.
- b. First motion: Alex Saltis
- c. Second motion: Kiera Lewis
- d. In favor? All Opposed? None Minutes passed.

F. SEAC Spotlight: Meagan White, M.Ed., LSLC Cert. AVEEd, Assistive Technology Specialist

- a. Meagan White is the district Assistive Technology Specialist. Meagan is a nationally certified auditory/verbal therapist and listening/spoken language therapist. She is also special ed certified PreK through High School. She has been with the district for 14 years, both as a teacher of the deaf and now as the assistive tech specialist. Has worked with many different populations.
- b. AT is something that helps students with academics, accessing curriculum, navigating the school. Definition of AT doesn't have to be high tech. Can be simple like pencil grips, slant board or can be a wheelchair, text to speech technology. Wide spectrum.
- c. AT can help all students. Also helps students with specific needs: executive functioning, attention, hyperactivity, vision, hearing, motor, communication, etc. Tonight focusing on broader AT but there are some highly specific communication technologies that SLPs are very familiar with.
- d. Implementers: teachers, SLPs, OTs/PTs, TVI, TOD, paras, students, counselors, parents

- e. At every IEP meeting there should be consideration of AT. What will help the student close gap, participate in inclusive setting. Can be part of postsecondary plans. Can be prevalent in testing accommodations. 504 planning: AT can also be considered in their accommodations.
- f. Low tech AT: Least restrictive. Examples color coded folders, increased font size, large calculator, lined paper, pencil grips, picture schedule, etc.
- g. Mid Tech - High tech have started meshing. Mid tech - doesn't take much training. Screen magnifier, voice amplification for teacher, adaptive keyboards,
- h. High tech: more complex and sophisticated. Typically electronic and require training. Wheelchairs, communication devices, text to speech/speech to text software.
- i. UDL - Dr. Jones and Dr. H have been instrumental in making sure all students have access to these tools
- j. Showed promotional video for Snap and Read:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ka0Ja50aoBs>
- k. Snap and Read
 - i. District has a subscription. Text to speech software system that is layered and does many things. Read aloud text, note taking, graphic organizing, simplifying text.
 - ii. Can access any website
 - iii. Discreet - not obvious that you have AT - doesn't over signal
 - iv. Feature review
 1. Remove distractions on a webpage
 2. Read for you - can choose voice and pacing while highlighting text, even if it's a pdf.
 3. Can scan an article and simplify vocabulary for complex words.
 4. Highlight a word and get a definition, common uses, pictorial representation
 5. Real time translation for second language learners.
 6. Line by line highlighting for reading.
 7. Create an outline with hyperlinks. Has a guide for various outlines. Can drag quotes into Google Docs with citations.
- l. Co-writer: Speech to text software, word prediction. Can support student's writing. Will explore in a future meeting.
- m. Can contact her at meagan_white@greenwich.k12.ct.us
- n. Questions:
 - i. Have you presented this to the staff? All sped teachers have had an opportunity to learn about Snap and Read and CoWriter. Have

done some PD with HS paraprofessionals. Are hoping to do PD with literacy specialists and English department this year.

- ii. How would parents get this for their children? All secondary students have this available to them on their chromebooks. The extension is a little puzzle piece at the top right. Snap and read and cowriter are loaded already. If you don't see it, will be available at the chrome webstore. These are both available through all student accounts/student emails on any device.
- iii. Is the district exploring AI tools at all? GPS has its own panel exploring AI tools and how we navigate these tools. There's a touch of AI within these two programs presented but they are safe and have been vetted.

G. Committee updates

- a. If people signed up for a committee, they should have received an email. If not, message us or send an email.
- b. Reminder that our working committees this year are set up to review the past 6 SEAC committee reports from 2021-2024. The goal in these committees is to review the past SEAC reports to the BOE, provide feedback on current status of the report findings and recommendations and revise and prioritize the outstanding recommendations. Collaboration in these meetings is essential to ensure we make significant progress. Aim is to have at least two meetings before the December break. Not too late to sign up. We have a good mix of stakeholders so far in both working committees.
- c. Eligibility and Implementation committee (with joint review of Consistency and Staffing). First meeting is next Tuesday 11/19.
- d. Inclusion and behavior committee (with joint review of Consistency and Staffing). First meeting is Monday 11/18.
- e. Nominating: Connecting this committee this week.
- f. Enrichment:
 - i. Had our first presentation in conjunction with Darien SEPAC and the Darien Library in September on Postsecondary Options for Students with Intellectual Disability and Autism featuring representatives from Think College and College Autism Network. We will put the link to the recording in the chat and also send that out via email.
 - ii. Coincidentally, GPS is also hosting a Postsecondary Panel via zoom this Wednesday with representatives from 5 colleges and the College Internship Program.
 - iii. Working on a spring presentation currently.

H. **Adjournment**

- a. Next meeting is 1/14/25.