

**Greenwich Special Education Advisory Council**  
**Meeting Minutes**

March 18, 2025

Zoom Meeting 6:30 pm

- A. Attendance
  - a. SEAC Members: Andi Cosby, Alex Saltis, Kiera Lewis, Jenni Reynolds, Pedro Campos, Lauren Hannemann, Mary Callison, Lisa Berluti, Abby Anders, Don McGuire, Beth Forger, Mariana Moreno, Veronica Chiavaroli, Jenn Donat, Alexis Cossifos
  - b. Ex Officio Members: Dr. Stacey Heiligenthaler
  - c. 12 Community Members
- B. Welcome and Opening Remarks from Chairperson
  - a. Looking forward to hearing from our Spotlight, Jocelyn Bruchman, updates from Dr. Heiligenthaler and Committee updates.
- C. Approval of 1/14/25 Meeting Minutes
  - a. Motioned by Alex Saltis, Seconded by Lisa Berluti, All approved, None opposed
- D. Public Comment
  - a. Veronica Chiavaroli shared some details relating to the discrepancy between the proposed BOE budget and the current BET proposed cuts and how this may impact SpEd programming. She encouraged attending the public hearing and commenting in person and/or online to show support for the full BOE budget.
  - b. A question was asked if there was any proposed changes to the budget at Community Connections - answered No.
- E. Updates from Dr. Heiligenthaler: Questions were submitted in advance by SEAC.
  - a. What is the plan for the continued rollout of UDL? The PCG report states that “staff have a working knowledge of UDL, but it has not been adopted as a consistent practice and many staff do not believe they can implement UDL with fidelity across all settings” PCG has recommended increased coaching, increased collaboration between teams to dispel the myth that UDL is a “special education initiative”, and expansion of resources particularly to the secondary levels. PCG also mentioned mindset challenges. What specific steps will GPS take to ensure that UDL is fully embraced and implemented with fidelity across the entire district? Follow up question: Have teachers outside core academic classes (specials/electives) had training in UDL? Are their classes included in GPS’ plan for improving implementation?
    - i. UDL is a gen ed initiative and happens in the gen ed classroom/Tier 1 instruction. The Sped Office helps to support the Curriculum Office and the schools in their implementation. UDL supports all students, not just Sped students and as we go into the next phase is really moving much more to the Curriculum Dept This is coming out of the Gen Ed curriculum and is not

- b. How does the district plan to address the widespread concerns regarding leadership within individual school buildings? This issue was a major focus of some focus group discussions. During the presentation, PCG stated that “mindset has not changed,” Without meaningful leadership improvements, any adjustments to MTSS will be ineffective. What concrete steps are being taken to ensure leadership changes that support sustainable progress?
  - i. MTSS is also under the gened umbrella. Kim Palladino leads that work. There are ongoing MTSS leadership meetings. Dr. Gabriel has worked with the curriculum department and schools to assess MTSS process at all the schools to provide calibration/feedback. Abby Anders was invited to speak further to the MTSS process from Tier 1 to Tier 3. There is a manual, process and forms and individual schools run their MTSS meetings.
- c. What is the threshold of missed services that trigger compliance issues for an IEP? (*What number of missed services becomes a violation specifically*) We understand compensatory services are not offered if makeups can be offered. However, is there a time limit on this? The PPT teams determine frequency and consistency needs of various services, so if a leave of absence or vacancy results in 2-3 months of no services, are makeups still the only option?
  - i. We’ve discussed this a lot during SEAC. Meeting minutes from last meeting cover this and if you have a specific question about your child, please reach out to Dr. Heiligenthaler directly.
- d. How are parents being educated about 504 and IEP plans? Are AP’s providing educational opportunities to parents to learn about services before PPT meetings?
  - i. When a student is referred for special education, there are several points of contact prior to to explain the process, answer questions and gather information. Services are determined at the PPT meeting. Teams make sure to determine individual needs to be sure the right providers/evaluators are included in the process. Recommendations for services come from the evaluator from each discipline, and they reach out to parents prior to the meeting to discuss evaluation results. There are several points of contact prior to initial PPT.
  - ii. A live question was asked if there was a checklist of points of contact for parents. Answer: There isn’t because each situation is individualized. If you go to the Sped section of the district website there are many resources. When a student is initially referred GPS does a developmental across the board. But dependent on the needs of the student, the point(s) of contact may be different. We never want parents to come to a PPT without having had any contact. Social workers should reach out, parent commented that they’ve never spoken to a social worker. A comment was made about how there have been parent coffees that try to provide information about what IEPs mean, and maybe that would be a good

thing to offer regularly. This is currently done in some buildings but is not district wide. Open to looking at this further.

- e. We've heard from a number of parents that they are being asked to consent to "targeted assessments" instead of a full triennial evaluation for students with 504 plans and IEPs. It is unclear if parents are being fully informed that agreeing to a targeted assessment could waive their right to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE). Can Assistant Principals and staff inform parents directly that agreeing to a targeted assessment may result in the forfeiture of their right to request an IEE? It is crucial that parents are fully informed and can trust that the process is transparent.
    - i. Families are eligible for an IEE for an initial or triennial evaluation. Previously there was only one form that allowed evaluations to be done. CTSeds has added a "Targeted Assessment" form. Triennials are done to determine eligibility. When the team is looking at an evaluation outside the initial or tri, they use the targeted assessment form. This is looking at something more specific that has become a concern. This does not take the place for initials or tris. If a student has been in special education for a long time, the team may determine a full triennial isn't warranted and they just do a file review or a few targeted assessments. This is called a targeted assessment because it's not comprehensive. You'd still have two forms in this situation - one for the triennial that says you agree to file review and the other that agrees to the few specific assessments you might still do. It's a newer form.
  - f. What is the Positive Pathways program for K to 5th and what will the program look like? What would the staffing model be for the program?
    - i. It's just a proposed program in the budget. Elementary specialized program: sped teacher, 2 paras and 1 BCBA in one classroom. These would be students that need more special education support because of behavioral needs. GPS doesn't currently have a program like this and would help keep students in district vs. outplacement. There are not many programs for children with these needs and they are not very close to Greenwich. Also makes it easier to transition back into general education because they already have some access. Also in the budget: 4th grade co-taught class at Cos Cob. A position for an additional PreK class due to growing numbers.
- F. SEAC Spotlight: Jocelyn Bruchman, Reading Lab Specialist for GPS
- a. First year with GPS. Was at Windward School for 6 years. Taught students and teachers. Currently pursuing doctorate in reading science. Has a sibling with reading disability.
  - b. Her job: Works with educators/admins. This year in a dozen of the schools. Works with families and attends IEPs. Makes sure instruction is appropriate/evidence based. Coaching/modeling/PD/consulting.
  - c. PD she provides: Science of reading, phonics/fluency, progress monitoring, comprehension, goal writing

- d. Best practice/Science of Reading
    - i. Evidence based: A ton of research. Most leading model: Scarborough's reading rope. New research coming out, even locally through Yale.
      - 1. Using science of reading programs: Wilson, PAF and SPIRE
    - ii. Method of instruction: literacy - best practice explicit instruction
    - iii. Multi sensory: research backs multiple senses improve learning/connection
    - iv. Phonics, sound, handwriting, apply in isolation, blend, connected text ultimate goal
    - v. Comprehension: Visualizing and Verbalizing, hierarchy of comprehension, fluency, background knowledge
    - vi. Oral language
    - vii. Assessment and data driven: At least 3 progress monitoring in every lesson daily. Standard for mastery 80%. 8-10 exposures to new content (vs 1-3 for neurotypical students), small group size no more than 5
  - e. Mindset shifts: Reading disabilities can't be cured. We can give strategies. Accuracy is better than speed.
- G. Committee Updates
- a. Eligibility/Implementation: Had a meeting last week. Went over previous meeting reports from eligibility, implementation, consistency and staffing. Hoping to have one more meeting and would like to focus on the PCG report.
  - b. Inclusion/Behavior: Will have one more meeting to go over an outline of everything and are starting the report.
- H. Adjournment: Next Meeting is May 13th at 7:00pm