

# Greenwich Special Education Advisory Council

## Meeting Minutes

May 13, 2025

Zoom meeting, 7:00pm

### A. Attendance

- a. SEAC Members: Andi Cosby, Alex Saltis, Kiera Lewis, Jenni Reynolds, Abby Anders, Don McGuire, Alexis Cossifos, Jenn Donat, Jennifer Dunn, Lauren Hannemann, Julia Reisch, Lisa Berluti, Mariana Moreno, Raquel Sosa, Sarah Hyres, Veronica Chiavaroli, Lucy Conrod
- b. Ex Officio Members: Dr. Stacey Heiligenthaler
- c. 14 Community Members

### B. Welcome and Opening Remarks from Chairperson

- a. Last meeting of the year. Thanks to all for commitment to SEAC's missions
- b. We will hold a lottery in June for open SEAC voting positions for next year
- c. Open to ideas for SEAC Spotlight for next year

### C. Public Comment: Shout out from Cos Cob teacher about the co-presentation by Meagan White and Rachel Rubin. Teachers found it very helpful and were all excited about technology options for both AT and inclusion. Was helpful to keep UDL in the front of teachers' minds

### D. Approval of Meeting Minutes for 3/18/25

- a. Motioned by Don McGuire, Seconded by Mariana Moreno
- b. All in favor, none opposed, minutes passed

### E. Remarks and Updates from Dr. Heiligenthaler

- a. *How are budget cuts going to affect Special Education programming?* Knows the budget is on everyone's mind. The Board is looking at many things. For the most part, special education services are required by law so not looking to cut staff. Hoping to still keep the new behavior program for next year (Positive Pathways) - knows the Board supports it. Goal is to keep students in district versus out of district placement, which is the alternative to the new program.
- b. *Parents are hearing that the evaluation team is being eliminated, is this true?* It is more about reorganizing K-8 evaluation team - Board voted on this last week. Members of eval team have been out for large portions of the year or subbing for other positions, so they looked at how they were evaluating students and what new options there might be. Now having current sped staff (psych, SLP, sped) do this as an extra paid duty. It's posted and many staff are interested in it. There is still an evaluation team for PreK and HS. It's not going back to the schools and having teachers picking up additional duties within their workday. Not cutting evaluations or adding to workloads, changing the model to suit the school level.

- c. *What is the focus for Special Education next school year?* The focus is continuing to grow our programming. Did a lot of training and changes quickly, so now want to grow the programs and trainings, expanding the continuum of programming throughout the continuum of of K-12 (eg writing revolution, visualizing and verbalizing, bridges math program, executive functioning at HS). Looking at how district can better deliver specially designed instruction in a general education classroom. In the process of creating a co-teaching handbook - should be available midyear. Most evaluations are moving to a digital platform.
  - d. *Have teachers outside of core academics had training in UDL recently?* UDL is a district-wide initiative. It's general education, not specifically special education. SESS works in conjunction with the curriculum coordinators and schools. Holistic approach. Curriculum heads and building leadership look at how UDL is implemented throughout the district and classrooms. This doesn't come from the special education department, but the department meets and supports the schools. Schools are responsible for how this is rolled out in their classrooms, including specials teachers. Some schools have a UDL checklist that they look for in classroom visits. District provides opportunities for professional development. SESS working to partner so SESS staff helps support gen ed teachers and also so Sped staff understands gen ed curriculum better.
  - e. *Can additional testing locations be added at GHS for students who have accommodations for testing in a separate setting?* Dr. H will share this with Mr. Mayo, the GHS principal. He will better be able to look at spaces that will work for students, so she will pass that on.
  - f. *Is there any information since the February board meeting about reducing the weight of midterms and finals for HS students with anxiety?* She does not have any information on that.
  - g. Dr. Carabillo retired in December. No one has replaced her at this time. There is a position posted as an assistant chief in the curriculum department.
  - h. *Follow up question on evaluation teams: Will these be done during the school day or outside of school hours so that services will not be impacted by providers doing evaluations?* There will still be testing during the school day. That is part of the school. There are occasions where it might be mutually convenient to do outside of school but first priority is during the school day.
  - i. Thanks to SEAC and appreciates the work and support.
- F. Approval of Next Year's Meeting Schedule
- a. 2025-2026 Meeting Dates - 6:30pm voting members/7pm public meeting
    - i. 9/30/25
    - ii. 11/11/25
    - iii. 1/13/26
    - iv. 3/17/26
    - v. 5/12/16
    - vi. Motioned to approve by Jenni Reynolds, Seconded by Don McGuire
    - vii. All in favor, none opposed

## G. Review and Approval of Annual Report

- a. Kiera Lewis presented on behalf of the Behavior/Inclusion committee. Will not go through the full report. Primary outcome of the committee is that there is no district-wide vision, without which all changes tend to be fragmented and not as effective as intended. Before we can dive into the specifics, would be beneficial to step back and establish a clear vision across all schools.. Lots of different interpretations of inclusion at each school. Often it is reported as a separate assignment for a kid within the classroom vs an educational approach for the full class.
    - i. Read from the report the suggestions of what to include on the district wide vision: Inclusion is a fundamental right, Collective responsibility of who supports diverse learners, Behavior-Inclusion integration - behaviors naturally reduce when in an inclusive environment that supports students' fundamental needs, Systemic Consistency throughout all schools, Neurodiversity Affirming Language. Establishing a clear vision will not impact the budget, and can help guide building on existing programs to ensure delivery of service is consistent and supportive
    - ii. Would like to start conversations now about what small steps we can do now to make the next school year smoother for all. Can co-teaching teams be created now for next year? What do staff need for PD at the beginning of the year?
  - b. Alex Saltis presented on behalf of the implementation and eligibility group. Biggest outcome of committee meetings is that there is a significant lack of consistency between schools and even classroom, and especially from one school level to another. Often gaps are discovered at each new level that were missed at previous levels resulting in an overload, particularly in high school, on existing staff. Reports continue that staffing is an issue impacting staff overwhelm and service delivery. Happy with the para rate increase and hope that helps recruitment and retention of these crucial team members. Recommend that APs need tools across schools to best facilitate IEP meetings. There is no tracking system for service hours in any school. Recommend that there is a uniform tracking system for service hours. Recommend more transparency as far as service implementation. Overall more consistency of IEP meetings and implementation from school to school is needed.
  - c. Motioned for approval: Veronica Chiavaroli, Seconded by Don McGuire
  - d. All in favor, none opposed, report passes.
  - e. Presentation of the annual report will be at the June BOE meeting
- ## H. Spring SEAC Education - May 27th Senator Gadkar-Wilcox
- a. John Hamel, enrichment chair, spoke about the upcoming SEAC presentation 5/27 at 7pm. Will speak about state special education outlook, strategic partnerships, future vision. Not a political speech. Will publish flyer in Together We Can and send out to general mailing list too.

- b. Reminder that there was a presentation in the fall in combination with Darien SEPAC on post secondary education. The link to the recording will be in the annual report.
- I. Approval of Proposed By-Law Changes
- a. Proposed changes were sent out to voting members with intent to improve sustainability and longevity of the council as it grows and turns over.
  - b. Summary of changes include:
    - i. Changing executive officers term from 1 year to 2 years and implementing an overlap with incoming and outgoing. Voting incoming officers in the January meeting instead of at the May meeting to allow 5 months of overlap.
    - ii. Establish an advisory committee to provide institutional knowledge about the council to the current executive board.
    - iii. Change alternate members role to be able to move in and out of voting to support quorum on a meeting to meeting basis.
  - c. Motion to approve: Abby Anders, Seconded: Alex Saltis
  - d. All in favor, none opposed, changes approved.
- J. Membership Term Review
- a. Reviewed term limits per member.
    - i. Voting members staying on or renewing: Pedro Campos (2026), Kiera Lewis (2027), Raquel Sosa (2026), Alex Saltis (2027), Andi Cosby (2026), Veronica Chiavaroli (2027), Lucy Conrod (2027), Jennifer Dunn (2027), Julia Reisch (2026), Lisa Berluti (2026), Jenn Donat (2027), Abby Anders (2026), Jenni Reynolds (2026), Mariana Moreno (2026),
    - ii. Voting members not continuing: Mary Callison, Christine Zilbich, Lauren Hanemann, Don McGuire (open to advisory), Liz Kitselman, Beth Forger, Dawn Zimmerman
    - iii. Alternate members staying on: Alexis, Sarah
  - b. Appeal to people to work on nominating this summer. There are no renewals next year so we want to make sure that we are proactively looking at nominating procedures. Email Greenwich SEAC if interested.
- K. Election of Executive Committee
- a. Current board will stay on an additional year:
    - i. Chair: Andi Cosby
    - ii. Vice-chairs: Kiera Lewis and Alex Saltis
    - iii. Corresponding Secretary: Jenni Reynolds
  - b. Recording Secretary position open: no nominations. Will revisit first visit of the year.
- L. Adjournment