

Greenwich Special Education Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes
October 14, 2025
Zoom meeting, 7:00pm

A. Attendance

- a. SEAC Members: Andi Cosby, Alex Saltis, Kiera Lewis, Abby Anders, Don McGuire, Alexis Cossifos, Jenn Donat, Jennifer Dunn, Julia Reisch, Lisa Berluti, Mariana Moreno, Sarah Hyres, Veronica Chiavaroli, Lindsey Kitner, Victoria Bee, Anchal Nigam, Jillian Fox, Pedro Campos, Julie Cevallos, Shelly Cryer, Maryana Geller, Christine Zilbich
- b. Ex Officio Members: Dr. Stacey Heiligenthaler
- c. 11 Community Members

B. Welcome and Opening Remarks from Chairperson

C. Committee Work for 2025-26

Survey completed to determine committee focus areas. Two main committees proposed for the year: Staffing and Teacher Morale (addressing understaffing concerns and ways to improve working conditions) and Communications and Public Relations (expanding outreach to parents about available resources and services).

D. Updates from Dr. Heiligenthaler

a. Staffing Formula Overview

i. Dr. Heiligenthaler presented the district's staffing formula worksheet used for the past two years for elementary and middle schools (excluding preschool, special programs, and high school which follow different models)

ii. Formula accounts for:

- 1. Direct service minutes from IEPs
- 2. Indirect service minutes (consultations, team meetings)
- 3. Evaluation time (12 hours/720 minutes allocated per triennial)
- 4. PPT meeting time
- 5. Contact minute ratio weighted by service intensity
 - iii. Target caseloads: starting at 11-13 students, growing to approximately 15 by April
 - iv. Formula accounts for workload, not just student count, by weighting cases based on service hours. Elementary schools have 1,500 instructional minutes per week; middle schools have 1,470
 - v. High school caseloads decreased from the 30s in spring 2021 to low 20s currently after adding a third special education teacher to each house
 - vi. Preschool maintains state-mandated ratios across 18 classrooms vii. Paraprofessional ratios range from 1:3 to 1:4 at elementary and 1:4 to 1:5 at middle school, depending on student needs

- viii. Budget Clarification: Dr. Heiligenthaler emphasized that any staffing changes were driven by enrollment shifts between schools, not budget cuts, with the Board and BET supporting necessary special education staffing

b. Academic Achievement Data

- i. Significant improvements shown in state testing results for special education students across all grade levels
- ii. Grades 3-5 ELA: Level 1 (struggling) decreased from 44% to 34% over five years; Level 4 (above grade level) increased
- iii. Grades 6-8 ELA: Similar upward trends observed
- iv. SAT Reading/Writing: Increased from 55% to 63.1%
- v. Math improvements across elementary, middle school, and SAT scores vi. Implementation of evidence-based programs (Wilson, VVPF, Writing Revolution, Bridges math, CAREs program) vii. Shift away from pulling students out of core curriculum; providing "double dose" of core instruction plus special education support
- viii. Science department initiated co-taught on-level biology classes replacing practical biology, with teachers developing curriculum and AI tools for support

c. Special Education Action Plan Update

- i. Updated action plan covers the next three years, building on the original 28 recommendations which are at least partially implemented
- ii. Incorporates PCG's recent update recommendations
- iii. Includes plan for new Coordinator of Student Wellness and Support position
- iv. 504 Plans—School counselors continue to handle 504 plans at the high school, with House administrators providing next-level support for complex situations
- v. Michelle Ianello's position was restructured to create a new position filled by Jessica McEvily, who oversees mental health for all buildings (50% GHS, 50% other buildings).
- vi. Follow-up question noted that Michelle also oversaw all 504s at the HS, questioning how that streamlines into mental health.—The school counselors are still doing the 504s at the high school. That hasn't changed. If there's a particular complicated situation, the House administrators would be the next level support for the school counselors. If it moves to an even more complex situation where somebody needs more help, it would fall to the coordinator. 504s fall under the Office of Special Education, so at the high school, after it goes through the House administrators, Harry might help or Dr.H . "For the most part, there's not a big change in how 504s are handled at the high school because the counselors were doing them before and they still continue to do them".

E. Enrichment Committee Update

- a. Upcoming Enrichment Event coordinated by John Hammel
- b. Speaker: Jennifer Libby is a former school principal and special education professional with 20+ years experience, founder of Promly (youth mental health platform), and national voice in youth mental health policy. Topic aligns with the district's mental health emphasis. Potential dates proposed: November 12, 18, or 19. Survey to be sent to determine final date.

F. SEAC Spotlight: Rachel Rubin: Using AI to Create Access

Technical difficulties with screen sharing, full presentation was rescheduled for the next meeting. Rachel provided a brief preview of Notebook LM, an AI study guide tool that converts PDFs into interactive study materials, podcasts, and videos. Tool demonstrated by uploading a seventh grade science PDF about kinetic and potential energy, which generated a natural-sounding podcast with AI voices and corresponding video content. The tool can chat with uploaded content and provide suggested questions. Useful for students studying for quizzes and for parents helping with subjects they may be unfamiliar with. Ignacio offered to collaborate with Rachel on additional features and uses for Notebook LM, noting extensive familiarity with the platform for both educational and personal use. Notebook LM website: notebooklm.google.com

G. Adjournment

Next Meeting: November 11, 2025