

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

A meeting of the Special Education Subcommittee was held on Wednesday, October 26, 2011 at 7:00 pm at Quincy High School. Present were Ms. Barbara Isola and Mrs. Emily Lebo, Chair. Also attending were Superintendent DeCristofaro, Ms. Judy Todd, Ms. Donna Cunningham, Mr. Richard Kelly, Ms. Erin Perkins, QPAC Board members, interested parents, and Ms. Laura Owens, Clerk.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Mrs. Lebo. Given that a School Committee quorum was not present, the meeting was held for informational purposes only.

Ms. Todd reviewed recent changes in 504 Plans, one specific issue relating to food allergies, which are no longer covered. 504 plans are for issues that substantially limit a student's ability to learn; some health issues are covered, but not all. Recent changes include the requirement to re-evaluate every three years (as in IEPs); QPS reviews every fall and re-evaluates each child's plan. 504s expire at the end of each school year. 504 plans are now documented in StarBase. Concerns were expressed about the process for removing students from 504 plans. Ms. Todd reviewed the procedure and noted that individual health plans have become the means for handling food and other allergies.

The next item on the agenda was IEP Implementation and Ms. Todd explained about the new tracking program (Easy Track) that allows for schedule monitoring for specialists. There was a subsequent discussion about requiring parent signatures for interim reports and report cards (as is required for progress reports) and perhaps utilizing Instant Alert so parents are aware of report release dates.

Ms. Todd then presented the Special Education Program Improvement Plan that was presented and approved at the School Policy Subcommittee meeting on September 26, 2011 and then approved at the School Committee meeting on October 5, 2011. Ms. Todd reviewed progress towards last year's goals, especially the new core ELA and supplemental Math for middle school that are fully implemented for this school year. She cited the success of the Orton Gillingham program (every elementary school has one certified or soon to be certified teacher and every middle school has one or more certified teachers) and the new Lexia (computer-based) program that is being used in resource rooms, allowing teachers to utilize small-group instruction strategies. Another goal from last year successfully implemented was the awareness of the new Anti-bullying regulations and implications for SPED students; IEPs are reflecting needs of these students.

In a review of the MCAS data and growth model (preliminary scores), Ms. Todd noted that Middle School math is a major concern, but the numbers are moving in the right direction. Mrs. Lebo noted that the Grade 10 numbers are phenomenal, especially considering the number of first time test takers in Grade 10. Professional development money through SPED grant will be focused on this area, as well as online coursework, DSAC support (for both SPED and regular education teachers). The goal is to

build math content knowledge base for middle school SPED teachers. High school math scores are showing impressive growth.

For 2011-12, the goals are focused on Standards 3 and 5: implementation of Lexia, understanding of updated regulations. Visualizing and Verbalizing training was completed; LIPS will be completed in the spring. QPAC goals are the same as last year, with new action steps. The Disability Book was a cooperative effort between QPAC and SPED team; can be used for all levels of school. Both the Program Improvement Plan and the Disability Book are available on the QPS website; special thanks to QPAC for the collaboration on the Disability Book.

There was a subsequent discussion about Math instruction and how to help prepare parents for the curriculum changes coming with the new Common Core Standards. Suggestions included hands-on Math workshops, sharing sample lesson plans (once available from DESE). Also discussed needed communication with teachers in terms of progress reports and comments more clearly describing student class performance. This is being followed for first term and will be discussed with School Committee at a meeting later this year; update on the issue can be presented at next SPED meeting.

For the QPAC Update section of the agenda, Jill Gichuhi presented on the goals and action steps for 2011-2012: Increase participation in QPAC by (1) increasing the visibility of QPAC in the schools and community, (2) improving communication between QPAC and members, and (3) improving the services provided through the Resource Center. Advise the district on special education policies, procedures, and programs by (1) evaluating information provided to substitutes regarding students with disabilities, (2) reviewing QPS transition-related procedures, and (3) developing a parent's guide to special education.

Ms. Gichuhi then reviewed the meeting schedule, including general meetings, subcommittee meetings, support groups, and special presentations and events. The December 8th presentation on Parent's Rights and Program Overview will need to be rescheduled. The discussion that followed centered on whether there it is possible to utilize Early Childhood program students to provide babysitting. Also, whether when a child is referred to SPED for initial evaluation, would it be possible to include information about QPAC with forms. Since most parents are new to SPED process, this might be a helpful kind of support.

The next item on the agenda was information about Social Skills Programming across QPS. Donna Cunningham discussed how it begins in integrated pre-school setting with *Tools of the Mind*. Building on this is *Second Step*, *DARE*, and *Steps to Respect* in elementary schools. Guidance counselors and school psychologists tailor content to groups as needed. In middle schools, guidance works on specifically targeted topics and special programs like *Rachel's Challenge* are presented. In high school, Life Skills programs are focused on these same topics. Transitional planning brings these topics into the IEP process. Also, in high school, the school psychologists have groups on social skills. NQHS reverse inclusion: AP/Honors students going into SPED classrooms and Student Council is working with learning centers. The subsequent discussion focused on how to ensure that all students have exposure to these

social skills programs in an immersive way. Ms. Todd clarified that individual IEPs do have specific goals for that and student and social skills information is often embedded in program. Some substantially separate classroom students who may not be able to participate in larger school activities have this content for student development every day. The group agreed that having a comprehensive list of what curriculum is being used in SST classrooms would be helpful information.

The last item on the agenda was Parental Concerns. Questions were raised about how team chairs know that a 3-year reevaluation is due (Easy IEP system has notification 60 days before due and parents can also remind team chair), how transitioning a student with IEP to college works (transition plan is specific, suggestions about support services at colleges, self-advocacy skills). Anticipation for the SPED Transition Guide (under development). Also discussed were concerns about people missing Instant Alerts (update contact information online at <https://instantalert.honeywell.com/>) and bus tags/privacy (use is optional, can be placed inside book bag rather than worn).

The next meeting is February 1, 2012.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45.