

Called for the purpose of discussing the student and parent experience of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process and meetings.

Members Present Ms. Kelly, Chair; Ms. Dexter, Mr. Kimbrough

Also Present: Dr. Morgan, Ms. Spera, Ms. Phillips, Ms. Grace

Ms. Kelly in the chair, a quorum of the Sub-Committee being present Ms. Kelly called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM and read the call of the meeting then turned the meeting over the Dr. Morgan.

Dr. Morgan introduced the staff at the table and started the presentation (on file in the School Committee office). She announced there will be three strategic planning meetings on April 25th, May 18th and June 13th.

Dr. Morgan gave an Overview of the Special Education Laws regarding IEP's. The Purpose of the Individuals Disability Education Act (IDEA) is to insure that all students with disabilities have available to them a free, appropriate education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living. It gives parents a voice in the education of the child and protects their rights.

She spoke about the IEP Timeline which begins with a referral for the child to be evaluated. The child must be evaluated within 5 school days. A multi-disciplinary team does the assessment and has 30 days from when they receive the consent form to assess the student. Optional Assessments could be Health, Psychological, or Home Assessment.

Ms. Spera spoke about student's language processing especially if the student has limited English Proficiency. They work with the bilingual department and have 45 working days for the evaluation process. Next they convene a team, determine whether the student requires Special Education and provide the parent with a copy of the team summary meeting which happens at the conclusion of the IEP team meeting.

The Eligibility Determination has ten categories. If a child has a disability but is making progress in the general education setting, they aren't eligible for special education. If later they require accommodations, a 504 plan will be done for the child to get extra help. If a student is eligible they develop an IEP plan, send it to the parent who reviews it and accepts, partially accepts or rejects the plan. If a parent responds no, we will notify the parent that we will not act on it.

The IEP identifies a student's special education needs and describes the services a school district shall provide to meet those needs. The IEP development relies on the judgement of all the team members. All IEP's are different.

The IEP includes: Parent and/or Student Concerns, Student Strength, Vision Statement (for the next 1-5 years), Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP) (general curriculum and other educational needs), Current Performance Levels/Measurable Annual Goals, Service Delivery Grid, Non Participation

Justification, Transportation Services, Participation in State/District Assessments, Accommodations for State/District Assessments, Additional Information, and a Placement Consent Form.

Ms. Phillips read more specific examples of the above sections of an IEP. A Measurable Annual Goal must be about skill building and not a subject area, must contain a target behavior, condition and criteria. The IEP is written to say what the staff is going to do and goals are written to reflect what the student will do; not what service is provided.

Ms. Spera spoke about examples of Non-Participation Justification which documents why a student might need to be removed during core subject areas, removed for all subjects or removed for significant and intense behavioral needs. It will state how a disability is justified and why those types of removal are made. It needs to be in the best interest of the individual student. We are required to do annual reviews of the IEP plan and three year re-evaluations, sometimes it is done sooner if requested by a parent or to intervene if students aren't progressing.

Ms. Phillips added we have been developing a guide for Special Educators because we are hiring many new staff members.

Dr. Morgan interjected that we are also providing on line video resources for our general education teachers so they can support the students.

Ms. Spera added that the state is looking at re-vamping the IEP which includes more interaction while writing an IEP so it is more controlled and focused on a student and they have more flexibility.

Ms. Grace commented that special education is not a one size fits all because children are individuals. She likes to have a picture of the child in their portfolio to bring it back to the individual. She reviewed necessary conditions for successful IEP development. She stated the members of the student's IEP team and what they need to do, including the general education teacher, the sending school district case manager, parent or guardian, student (at age 14 is required to attend meetings, or they can come when younger), the special education teacher, clinicians (PT, OT, BCBA, Speech Therapist, transition services agency representative, as appropriate) and the ELL provider (as needed).

Dr. Morgan added in the future we are going to be working with students to self-advocate in the Upper Schools.

The floor was opened to questions or concerns from the public.

Mr. Kimbrough asked are there universal interventions in place before a request for special education services is done? Dr. Morgan responded there are several assessments that can be given and kids that aren't working on grade level will be seen by an interventionist. There are several things students can do for 6-8 weeks and if a student is not making progress then a referral is made and the team will discuss. If there is a social emotional problem, there are screeners that can be done which is not as distinctive. The district is forming a STSS team to put systems in place so everyone is on the same page to support kids. The state is focused on STSS and training that looks at a tier system of support, and how we are giving strong tier levels. Ms. Phillips commented that she is on the Math think tank at the high

school. The high school does not have interventionists but we do have a pilot where two Specialists that work on spelling and comprehensive strategies seminar.

Ms. Spera and Ms. Grace are on the instructional council and looking at how we choose curriculum and building in the universal design across the board with special education with learning styles in mind.

Ms. Rosenberg, Kennedy Longfellow Parent, stated the general education teacher referral form does not have enough space to write everything on it. Can they have access to an on-line form? Ms. Spera responded that they do have access to the form online because we wanted to make sure it was legible. We will send out a reminder so all teachers know they have access to it. Ms. Phillips receives these forms and has been reminding teachers and administrators that it is part of the child's official education file. Ms. Rosenberg stated some of her child's goals overlap. How is the focus driven? Ms. Spera explained the team decides what to focus on first so we can build a good foundation and move on from there. Ms. Grace added assistive technology may be needed for support. Ms. Phillips added at the secondary level we feel like we are running out of time and that drives how we prioritize what we are focusing on.

Ms. Soto was impressed that the child can self-advocate. As far as the system consistency, as an example, when a family requests an IEP meeting you have 30 days to meet, are you meeting the legal requirement? Is it up to the parent to know their legal rights? Are you tracking referrals to the more sub-separate programs?

Dr. Morgan responded yes, we are tracking and monitoring the data every month. Individuals are observing the child in the classroom to see how he is progressing in that environment. No two schools are alike in this district. What a child experiences in one school looks vastly different at another school. We have done a lot of work with the Specialists and Principals. Ms. Spera added yes we do track when we get a request for a referral and get them done and out within the five days. We are always checking the timelines. We also have periodic reviews where the State comes in and randomly checks files with specific areas to verify that things are done within a certain time frame. We have a lot of staff and if we have a high level of referrals we can send another person to another school that needs help. Dr. Morgan added there is a lot of collaboration. Ms. Phillips added Coordinators get reports every other month about evaluations and every other week the Case Manager gets an updated list of IEP's that are coming up or are overdue. Ms. Spera noted we have one person in each building to keep track of the assessments and I meet with Psychologists and let them know if they need to get new forms signed.

Ms. Palmer, CSUS and Out of District Parent, asked about out of compliance reports that are received is that supposed to be passed along to the parent? Ms. Phillips answered it is not that it is supposed to be passed along but when I get the report I will contact them to be sure we are not delinquent in meeting those guidelines. Ms. Palmer's older child is out of district if he is not making progress do you pass that information to my case manager? His school reports in quarters and the third quarter progress report is the same he is not making progress. Do I go back to my case manager? Ms. Spera answered usually they send the data to us. You can ask to see the data and reconvene a meeting.

Ms. Soto asked should a parent request in the IEP that the team meet, for example, three times a year? Ms. Spera responded that she has seen that in IEP's and it is appropriate. You and the team can request a re-evaluation anytime.

Ms. Phillips assured you can refer requests to the Coordinator of the school based team if you are not seeing progress. If you don't get results you can contact us. We have a district student consultation meeting every month and if a student is struggling to make progress we may be able to get additional resources or out of the box ideas that teams can use.

Ms. Dobak SEPAC Co-Chair and Parent out of district, asked when the team meets what instructions are they given when making decisions that are out of the box, what is typical? Somebody will say we don't know if Cambridge does that. My understanding is that is not supposed to be the process. We are not hearing that the child doesn't need that, how do you respond? Ms. Spera replied she would tell them don't ever do that because it is your responsibility for whatever the discussion was. We try to meet with people early so that doesn't happen because that is not what the regulations say. Sometimes we need to take another look and bring a group of people with us that has more experience about what we are speaking about. They know that the team makes decisions and I cannot overrule their decision. They can ask for guidance and we give our best advice based on our experience. We have people that call and say we are looking at 3-4 private schools what do you think of them? I can respond because I have had interactions with many schools. Ms. Dobak asked are parents invited to the District consultation team meetings? Ms. Spera replied no. Ms. Dobak asked are they informed about them so they could go if they wanted to? Ms. Spera replied they have been. Dr. Morgan interjected we are required by law to have an administrator or designee on the IEP team that can authorize those decisions.

Ms. Palmer was specifically told to go back and ask Ms. Spera. There have been times when they are out of compliance and Ms. Grace was at the meeting and nobody on the team said anything.

Ms. Kelly responded there are a lot of regulations built into the law and when a student goes thru transitions and as a parent I felt pressure to make a decision about a transition plan post high school. Ms. Spera stated our high school has focused on making connections with agencies early and involving them early about transitions and to get the guardianship piece in place. Now we can use that with other students that are out of district through the liaisons.

Mr. Kimbrough left the meeting at 7:40 PM.

Ms. Soto asked what can we expect when transitioning from K-5 to middle school? Ms. Phillips replied we have added 5 to 6 and 8 to 9 projection meetings so we understand what is needed. We schedule mapping meetings so student's schedules are coordinated because students have multiple teachers. Students with disabilities get their first choice electives and classes aren't overloaded with students with disabilities. We build a bridge by giving portfolios. In sub-separate classrooms teachers visit the grade the student is coming from to observe what is going on in that class.

Ms. Dobak asked is there a certified language specialist translator? Ms. Spera stated that is on the DOE task force and Friday we will have a final recommendation around interpretation that will go to the legislators. It will include a proposal for a tiered level system which will include guidelines for a certified

person and will be done with UMASS Amherst and DESE is going to develop some modules which will include confidentiality training.

Ms. Palmer feels that the school has not been able to collect accurate data regarding behavior because my child has not had a neuro psych evaluation. We are in the process of looking for another placement, my concern is what is the school telling the other schools where my child may possibly end up at? Ms. Phillips responded parents can see what paperwork is sent in the packet to the receiving school and can tell them not to include certain paperwork. Ms. Spera added usually we send the most recent IEP and you can say I don't want to include, for example, the psych evaluation. Ms. Palmer exclaimed I did not know I could ask to see what's in the packet. Ms. Phillips explained if we receive only certain papers we can call the school and they tell us that's all the information we have permission to send.

Motion to adjourn by Ms. Dexter seconded by Ms. Kelly at 8:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Terry Gist
Confidential Secretary to the School Committee

Documents on file in the School Committee Office
Special Education IEP Presentation