

Virtual Special Education & Student Supports Sub-Committee
Wednesday, August 5th, 2020
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the purpose of creating a space for families of Special education scholars to discuss concerns and hopes for the fall plan. The meeting started at 2 p.m.

Members Present: Member Wilson, Chair; Member Rachel; Member Weinstein

Also Present: Dr. Morgan; Assistant Superintendent for Student Services; Jean Spera, Special Educator Director

Member Wilson is in the chair. Member Wilson provided context and guidelines for the meeting. Member Wilson opened the meeting for a presentation.

Dr. Morgan outlined the presentation: updates, remote learning plan, and a Q&A section.

Ms. Spera gave updates on Compensatory Services and Recovery Support: 1) Recovery Support; 2) COVID-19 Compensatory Services; 3) Additional IEP Services. Ms. Spera also provided that DESE is targeting three groups of students to be a priority: 1) Already documented high-level needs students, preschool students who were not eligible, and students who are turning or have turned 22 between March-December 2020.

Dr. Morgan provided three possible staged approaches to reopening in accordance with guidelines from DESE: fully in-person, hybrid and fully remote. Dr. Morgan reviewed the plan for fully remote including four objectives: 1) Nurture Relationships; 2) Provide differentiated learning experiences; 3) Partner With Families, 4) Focus support on students with greatest needs.

Member Rachel shared the progressive stacking model for public comment: starting with scholars of color, then families of color, then educators of color and then others. Member Wilson opened the meeting for public comment.

Zuleka Queen-Postell asked how the district will monitor the services to students outside of the district. Dr. Morgan replied that CPS has case liaisons to connect with families and determine what services are needed for each family.

Zuleka Queen-Postell asked if there was someone appointed to connect with school/families during the extended years. Ms. Spera responded that there are various ways in which families and out of district students have been assisted throughout the summer into the school year.

Member Wilson asked how CPS is communicating with families out of the district. Dr. Morgan provided that they use an internal email list and are working on a better process of sending the information out.

Zuleka Queen-Postell asked how is CPS making sure out of school families are being heard? She shared that she's only received one communication and raised concern from other families. Dr. Morgan provided that they are trying to make different points of contact to families and moving forward, there has been discussion of check-ins beyond e-mails and they are striving to improve family contact.

Amtual Mahmud asked if there had been a decision made concerning the role of older staff and at-risk educators. Dr. Morgan discussed how there was a staff survey that closed on July 7th asking the staff members with extenuating circumstances. Data is now being analyzed and the plan will further be developed with HR Department and the Union.

Amatul asked for clarification on if that means students assigned and the role for next year. Dr. Morgan shared information about synchronous and pre-recorded instruction.

Ashley Brown asked about the outreach efforts of this Sub-Committee to solicit family opinions on what kind of learning might be happening this year. She shared that she received a petition via text asking the administration to adopt a fully remote model and her concerns that she did not get any chance to ask her opinion. Dr. Morgan clarified that text petition did not come from her office. Ashley Brown stated that it came across that it came from the district. Member Weinstein provided that it perhaps it came from SE-PAC. Member Rachel remembered that perhaps it was the text from the district's survey on hybrid options.

Ashley Brown clarified that the text did come from SE-PAC and was unclear about how it differs from the school district. Rosalie Rippey provided context on what SE-PAC is and its relationship to the district.

Ashley Brown asked how the Sub-Committee reached out to parents to find out what their needs/opinions were. Dr. Morgan provided that the Office of Student Supports sent out a survey in mid-June asking for how they could provide better support. Then another survey came out from the district on parent preference for the summer and a follow up from liaisons. In regards to student reach-out, there has been a student working group and giving feedback. There are town halls and other Sub-Committees. Also discussed how her office is available.

Ena Valenzuela expressed her concern over the language of the presentation about being "told" what the plan for their child was and emphasized the importance of having families as stakeholders in addition to the teachers, union and others and the importance of centering child's independent needs. Dr. Morgan commented that the language of "told" rather than "heard" is an unfortunate miscommunication and the goal is to hear from our families, have a discussion and gather input. Dr. Morgan stated that parents are stakeholders.

Lisa Downing asked for an update about testing, evaluations, and other assessments. Dr. Morgan acknowledged the backlog of assessments and there has been discussion in creating another team dedicated to complete evaluations and IEP Meetings. Ms. Spera discussed how they are trying to broaden their ability to do testing.

Lisa Downing asked if there will be an opportunity for students who qualify for IEP but deferred IEP made, entitled for compensatory services too? Dr. Morgan confirmed that they will be providing those services on a case by case basis.

Misha Rosenberg asked if there should be a shift in the mindset and that most students will be doing remote learning. She asked if there could be a way to reduce the paperwork for educators and increase the services. Dr. Morgan provided an update from the working group that there has been discussion on minimizing paperwork. Dr. Morgan highlighted the importance of documentation as well as providing services.

Robyn Towner asked 1) What are we doing to work out educators split grades and are mixed between in-person and remote? 2) In the needs assessments with families, are we talking about students from June or we will we need to know the 2021 caseload? 3) What are some equitable ways to choose those students who didn't access gen-ed curriculum or special-ed curriculum? Dr. Morgan discussed how split grade level is a concern, the district still does not have a definitive plan but the goal. On the second question, Dr. Morgan provided an update from the discussions that have been happening and is still being developed. On the third question, Dr. Morgan provided that they are revamping educator expectations and the consideration of automatic weekly reminders to families/students.

Rosalie Rippey pointed out positives from Dr. Morgan's presentation. She asked 1) for clarification on the hybrid model having a part-time service model; 2) Extending the time period for transition services; 3) highlighted the importance of consistency in scheduling. Dr. Morgan discussed the aim for consistency

across the district. Rosalie highlighted the importance of daily consistency. Dr. Morgan provided that the part-time service model is if the district goes remote and noted that some services will still need to be available in person. Dr. Morgan noted that the Special Services department needs to improve on getting information out. Ms. Spera provided an update that the department can be creative on providing transitional services.

Member Wilson extended the meeting for 15 minutes. Motion by Member Rachel, Seconded by Member Weinstein.

Carol Gavin asked what thoughts have been put into the in-class supports.

Karen asked about the extending transition about 1) Extending transition planning services beyond the age of 22?; 2) Are out of district students who aren't able to engage in the platform and high risk at risk of losing their placement? Dr. Morgan confirmed that they are not at risk for losing their placement.

Liza Gosselin discussed the importance of letting parents know immediately on whether students will have different teachers in regards to remote and in-person learning.

Dr. Morgan responded to Carol providing that the district is working with public health officials on how to keep students. Dr. Morgan responded to Karen that the department is working with families to see what additional supports would be necessary for adult students turning twenty-two. Dr. Morgan responded to Liza that they have to wait for the data surrounding staffing/students and that there may well be changes in regards to who is teaching what and how.

Liluye Jhala asked 1) If there is an option of looping teachers/special educators who have already built an in person connection with their students? 2) Are there any continuity with service providers from the summer months? If there is the opportunity to have one on one teaching assistants from universities to provide greater support? Dr. Morgan provided that looping has come up in conversations but have not come to a conclusion. For the second question, summer staff is diverse from all over the district and availability. We would try to continue to transfer skills learned to the supports for each student. In regards to the students from universities, Dr. Morgan discussed how it depends on the model and need to look at our existing staff to better utilize them then to look to branch out to connect with Lesley, Harvard, and others in the area.

Member Wilson summarized the meeting and the take-always. She discussed compensatory services, more levels of communication, decreased paperwork-increased services, partnerships with families, transitional services, and utilizing universities for supports. Member Wilson discussed how something not mentioned but that we should be thinking about is transportation and the importance of clear expectations.

Member Wilson invited anyone to provide additional questions/thoughts at awilson@cpsd.us. She discussed how in October the topic of the Sub-Committee will be reading benchmarks.

Member Wilson announced that there will be a virtual town hall meeting on Tuesday August 11 at 3:30 pm. Member Wilson thanked everyone. Member Wilson ended the meeting at 3:42 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Allison Daley
Confidential Secretary to the School Committee Office