

January 23, 2023

SPECIAL EDUCATION & STUDENT SUPPORTS SUBCOMMITTEE

Virtual Special Education and Student Supports Subcommittee
Monday, January 23, 2023
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138

Called for the purpose to update the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) framework, introducing the Director of Special Education, and discussing the tiered literacy interventions.

Subcommittee Members Present: Member Wilson (Chair), Member Weinstein, Member Rojas

Other School Committee Members Present: Vice-Chair Rachel, Member Hunter

Also Present: Dr. Barbara Mullen, Asst. Supt. of the Office of Student Services, Dr. Frank Alves, Executive Director of Special Education; and Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SE-PAC) members Karen Dobak and Lisa Downing

Chair Wilson started the meeting at 5:01 pm. She welcomed the group and read the call of the meeting. She shared the agreements for the discussion, which included:

- Speak and listen from the heart
- Share the air
- Lean into discomfort/make yourself someone willing to be educated
- Expect and accept non-closure
- Bike rack (Things to note for future discussion)
- Members are able to share comments for up to 3 minutes

Chair Wilson shared the following brief breathing/mindful exercise from [Headspace](#). Following the exercise, **Chair Wilson** facilitated introductions and asked participants to share their favorite winter activities/pastimes. She passed the floor to Dr. Mullen.

Dr. Mullen shared her appreciation for the former leader of CPSD's Special Education efforts, Jean Spera. She expressed her enthusiasm for the new Executive Director of Special Education, Dr. Frank Alves, and asked that he share his entry plan. Dr. Alves then presented his CPS entry plan. Highlights included:

- Personal background
- Entry plan's goals, purpose, and methodology
- His preliminary themes and observations
- Practice changes and updates
- Current projects

In addition, Dr. Alves shared that he is planning to present to the School Committee this winter to share an update. Dr. Mullen solicited questions from the group. **Member Rojas** inquired if Dr. Alves is reviewing existing CPS policies and plans to make recommendations should some need updating. Dr. Alves confirmed he is reviewing current policies and wants to ensure that he gathers the necessary data before making recommendations to the team. He is reviewing existing policies and his recommendations regarding updating existing policies. Frank wants to gather data and make recommendations to the team. Frank will put together recommendations. Member Weinstein appreciated Mr. Alves's thoughtful process and acknowledges that transitions provide an opportunity for a fresh perspective. He echoed Member Rojas's comment that Dr. Alves should consider reviewing policies that can have the greatest impact.

January 23, 2023

SPECIAL EDUCATION & STUDENT SUPPORTS SUBCOMMITTEE

Ms. Dobak welcomed Dr. Alves and asked if he was looking at the expectations of CPS staff who are working with Special Education students. She believes that expectations are too low. She asked if he is looking at the curriculum of the self-contained programs and if there is alignment with state frameworks. In addition, she inquired if special needs students will have access to the curriculum being used for students without special needs.

Dr. Alves shared that he frames expectations as practices and his desire to “raise the bar.” As part of this process, He plans to look at curriculum, rigor, and access. He highlighted that programming is multifaceted and includes– technology, student/teacher ratio, curriculum the necessary accommodations to get students to the next level.

Member Hunter welcomed Dr. Alves and shared that she was enthusiastic about priorities and appreciated his condor about CPSD’s compliance issues. She highlighted that parents must be involved in decision-making and the importance of gaining parents’ trust. Ms. Downing thanked Mr. Alves for the presentation and echoed Member Hunter’s remarks that parents want to be involved. She asked Mr. Alves how he was measuring impact. Mr. Alves agreed that his work should always be student-centered and agreed that measuring impact is important. He shared that once the strategic plan is established, he is committed to measuring student impact and reviewing student data. Chair Wilson agreed that work needs to be student-centered and parent involvement needs to be strengthened. She passed the floor to Dr. Mullen.

Dr. Mullen highlighted that her team trying to create a scaffolding system of district support. She highlighted Dr. Alves’s good work and underscored the importance of compliance and equitable instruction for all students. Dr. Mullen pivoted the discussion by presenting a presentation highlighting the Multi-tiered Systems of Support THE presentation highlighted the following:

- Entry Methodology and Compliance/Khita Pottinger-Johnson, Director of MTSS
- Entry Findings
- Strategic Initiatives
- MTSS Definition
- Elements and Tiers of the MTSS Framework
- MTSS Pyramid
- Practice Examination
- MTSS Drivers and Indicators
- Social Emotional Learning (SEL)
- MTSS and UDL
- Resource Knapsack

Dr. Mullen turned the focus to priority literacy interventions and the work of the Literary Coordinator, Emily Bryan led the second presentation of the evening. Following the presentation, Dr. Mullen solicited questions from the group and passed the floor to **Chair Wilson** who solicited questions. Ms. Dobak shared her enthusiasm for the presentations notably literacy and Universal Design (UDL). Ms. Dobak asked the timeframe for when the district would be teaching reading according to the science of reading which has been a focus of the SE-PAC for several years. Dr. Mullen responded that the science is being used in pockets. She wants to ensure our principals and literacy coaches are in alignment. She highlighted that Emily Bryan is in the process of managing a curriculum adoption committee to ensure all educators are in alignment. She highlighted that originally 80 teachers were participating in LETRs training and now 180 teachers are involved. There is a 3-year strategic approach and Dr. Mullen suggested that Emily Bryan should connect with SE-PAC to share an update on the process.

Ms. Downing wanted to highlight that writing should be a priority as well and noted that she believes it is a weakness at CPSD and for students with special needs. She noted that she is aware of several CRLS graduates who have faced challenges with writing papers in college. Ms. Downing asked if there was a literacy plan for

January 23, 2023

SPECIAL EDUCATION & STUDENT SUPPORTS SUBCOMMITTEE

middle and high school students who are still behind in reading and writing. Dr. Mullen responded that the Falcon Block at CRLS provided an opportunity for students to focus on reading and writing improvements. She highlighted that the upper schools have brought in Paper, 24-hour online tutoring support, which implements a Socratic method teaching model.

Member Weinstein shared his appreciation for Dr. Mullen's presentation and echoed her priority of getting Tier 1 right. He asked about the collaborative efforts of the MTSS framework and Dr. Edwards' Instructional Frameworks. Dr. Mullen confirmed that she is working in partnership with Dr. Edwards and that the Instructional Frameworks serve as the umbrella.

Member Rojas shared that he had a few questions but given the time constraints, he would follow up with Dr. Mullen independently.

At the close of the meeting, **Chair Wilson** underscored that participants should not hesitate to follow up with her or Dr. Mullen with additional questions. She thanked Dr. Mullen and Dr. Alves for their participation and shared that she would follow up with the group regarding the next meeting in April.

The meeting concluded at 6:31 pm.