

April 23, 2023

**SPECIAL EDUCATION & STUDENT SUPPORTS  
SUBCOMMITTEE**

Special Education and Student Supports Subcommittee  
Monday, April 24, 2023  
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio  
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA 02138

Called for the purpose to start the community conversation around Strategic Tutoring.

**Subcommittee Members:** Ayesha M. Wilson (Chair), José Luis Rojas, David Weinstein

**Other School Committee Members Present:** Rachel Weinstein, Caroline Hunter

**Also Present:** Dr. Karyn Grace, Interim Asst. Superintendent of the Office of Student Services, Dr. Frank Alves, Executive Director of Special Education, Desiree Phillips, OSS Coordinator of Upper Schools and High School, members of the Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SE-PAC): Zuleka Queen-Postel (liaison), Karen Dobak, Danielle Jones-McLaughlin, Maya Gonzalez

**Chair Wilson** started the meeting at 6:02 p.m. She welcomed the group and read the call of the meeting. She asked participants to introduce themselves and share their favorite flower. Following introductions, she led the group in a brief breathing exercise and asked Member Rojas to read the agreements of the meeting:

1. Speak and listen from the heart
2. Share the air
3. Lean into discomfort/make yourself someone willing to be educated
4. Expect and accept non-closure
5. Bike rack (Things to note for future discussion)

**Chair Wilson** turned the meeting over to Dr. Grace who shared a brief history of Strategic Tutoring at CPSD and her familiarity with the model given her former role in the district. She highlighted that her presentation slides were in draft form. She is seeking feedback from colleagues, families, and caretakers. She underscored that a QR code would be provided on the last slide which linked to the survey. She recently presented to school principals and is eager for feedback from a variety of sources.

Dr. Grace shared her screen and gave the following [presentation](#). She highlighted that tutoring would be available to all students, with or without an IEP. Her team is focused on a combined approach to encourage greater success. Currently, tutoring happens during the school day within intervention/enrichment blocks to minimize disruption and to ensure that students are not missing classroom lessons. She plans to add an afterschool strategy, as well as February and April vacation weeks with Acceleration Academy and summer programming. In addition, she highlighted the goal of updating the program name from Strategic Tutoring to Excel.

Dr. Grace shared her work with Math Acceleration Academy. She visited the Putnam Avenue Upper School with Math Coordinators. She was enthusiastic about the students' engagement and real-life problem-solving using skill-based methods. Students were engaged and proud. There are discussions to expand the program to the ELA Academy. The goal is for students to exit out of these tutoring models once they meet grade standards.

Currently, the intervention model is in place for the school day. Dr. Grace touted the benefits of i-Ready, but supplemental approaches and increased learning time will have a greater impact. Data confirms that personalized, targeted support is key. The augmented model will be targeting the subskills of reading. Dr. Grace highlighted that the number of students needing intensive tutoring is not distributed evenly across schools. She is encouraging principals to undertake a spring student assessment to supplement the fall assessment which is already in place.

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The winter i-Ready data shows that 666 students performed two or more grade levels behind. Dr. Grace is encouraged that schools and families are accessing the i-Ready data. She highlighted that academic performance increases significantly with more dedicated tutoring time. CPSD has a goal of three days per week with at least 30-60 minutes for each session.

Dr. Grace shared a sample of an after-school tutoring model. The team has a goal of a seamless transition from the regular classroom. Dr. Grace is hopeful that Excel tutors will be current teachers or literacy coaches with a plan to offer stipends to incentive involvement. She is hopeful that principals can help in identifying candidates. Paraprofessionals could assist with covering absences. Student and Excel educator attendance will be the key to success. Although current CPSD staffing is in flux with the MTSS Director on leave, Dr. Grace plans to move forward with the augmented tutoring model.

Dr. Grace highlighted that additional steps need to be addressed to help ensure success including providing transportation for late days, providing food/snacks, building incentives (raffles, etc.), and offering SEL opportunities. At the conclusion of the presentation at approximately 6:52 p.m., Dr. Grace encouraged sharing the QR code which leads to a Google form/survey for feedback. She is currently sending out the survey for translation to increase its accessibility. Dr. Alves concurred that he is looking forward to survey feedback and how this model will integrate with Special Education services.

**Chair Wilson** opened the floor for questions and comments, encouraging families and community members to speak first. SE-PAC member, Danielle Jones-McLaughlin shared her positive reaction to the presentation and was curious about the time commitment required by students. Dr. Grace agreed that SEL opportunities need to be built into the Excel model. Personally, as a teacher, Dr. Grace shared that personal connections are often forged during after-school activities and she hopes to create a supportive, fun, and engaged environment. Dr. Grace shared her concern about implementing the model with schools that end at 4:00 p.m.

Sheli Wortis, a community member, asked about the relationship between human tutors and computer-dedicated time. Dr. Grace shared that at least 30 minutes on the computer three times per week is the recommendation. She stressed that this engagement needs to be monitored to ensure that growth is happening. She highlighted that teacher intervention will be woven into the process but was unable to provide a perfect ratio. Dr. Alves shared that in order to maximize instruction, a computer is necessary for personalized instruction but teachers are needed to support and move the process forward.

SE-PAC member, Zuleka Queen-Postell, shared that when the district originally rolled out i-Ready it was intended for 45 minutes per subject per week and asked if this recommendation had changed. If so, how was this update communicated with families? Dr. Grace was not familiar with this original i-Ready recommendation and offered to follow up with i-Ready. In addition, Ms. Queen-Postell offered to send Dr. Grace the materials she referenced, including a video of the presentation.

Desiree Phillips, OSS Coordinator of Upper Schools and High School joined the meeting at 7:12 p.m.

**Member Rojas** asked about using i-Ready to identify students who need Excel tutoring, noting that some students may not take the assessment seriously. How is this monitored? Dr. Grace highlighted again the need for a spring assessment to identify shifts in scoring and the need to continually monitor progress by the educator to understand the "story" behind the numbers. For example, educators can determine the number of minutes that a student has dedicated to a tutoring session.

**Member Hunter** shared her excitement for Dr. Grace's presentation and appreciated her enthusiasm for this important work. She agreed that Excel needs ongoing evaluation from staff and students and a fun environment needs to be created for students. She is excited about the ability to drill down into the data for individual students. She likes the QR code for feedback and appreciated that Dr. Grace shared data/numbers.

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Community member, Karen Dobak is excited about increasing i-Ready and thinks it is a wonderful tool. She shared that early intervention with students is key.

SE-PAC member, Danielle Jones-McLaughlin, agreed with the enthusiastic responses to the presentation. As she is a parent with a child with an IEP, she highlighted that frequent and open communication with caregivers is critical. She wants to see i-Ready succeed.

In reference to Member Rojas' concern, Zuleka Queen-Postell, highlighted that i-Ready is tailored to the student with the next test being based on the previous test. The program can identify when a student has mastered a skill.

**Member Weinstein** thanked the presenters and thanked Ms. Jones-McLaughlin for raising the critical need for ongoing communication and highlighted that receiving i-Ready reports without context is not necessarily enough. In addition, he wanted to ensure that students are not missing dedicated class time and specials including music and art. He echoed previous sentiments that it will be important to learn more about student and teacher engagement outside of the computer-dedicated time. He agreed with Dr. Grace's assessment that building personal connections (snack time, etc.) are important components of these efforts. He is curious if these supports will be provided to only students who are more than two grade levels behind. He is hopeful to catch students at an earlier stage to prevent further drop-off.

**Member Hunter** highlighted that the team should be working from a non-deficit model and she appreciated that Dr. Grace provided the data without the school names attached.

**Vice-Chair Rachel** thanked Dr. Grace for stepping into her interim role with such enthusiasm and thanked Dr. Alves for his support. Vice-Chair Rachel shared her enthusiasm for the work and its data-driven model. She highlighted that her 9<sup>th</sup> grader does not enjoy working with i-Ready. She would like to learn more about the human interaction throughout the process. What do you see when you go into this space? She found the discussion very helpful.

**Chair Wilson** shared her closing thoughts and echoed her excitement for the work. She offered the following questions: How are we intentionally and strategically supporting student needs? What are the challenges that we foresee in rolling out this model? How do we strategically work with our partners and offer impactful professional development opportunities? In addition, she wants to ensure that families are supported, informed, and empowered. She commended Dr. Grace and thanked Dr. Alves. She hopes to identify a June meeting date so that Dr. Alves can provide an update on his work.

The meeting concluded at 7:38 p.m.