

Virtual Special Education & Student Supports Sub-Committee
Wednesday, October 28th, 2020
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the for the purpose of reviewing and discussing the OSS safety manual and OSS school coordination and collaboration. The meeting started at 6 pm.

Members Present: Member Wilson, Member Rachel, Member Weinstein

Also Present: Mayor Siddiqui; Dr. Turk, Deputy Superintendent; Dr. Morgan; Assistant Superintendent for Student Services; Jean Spera, Special Educator Director; James Maloney, Chief Operating Officer

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

Dr. Morgan outlined the presentation: 1) Overview 2) Health, Safety, and Operation 3) Instruction 4) Staffing 5) Next Steps 6) Q & A

Dr. Morgan started the presentation with part 1: Overview

- She shared updates of in-person and enrollment and the number of in-person Sub-Separate Classrooms

Dr. Morgan turned the meeting over to Desiree Phillips for part 2: Health, Safety and Operations

- Successes: collaborative effort between public health experts, administration and educators; PPE for staff; protocols for student observations; assessment space for OSS evaluators; many of our preschool students and students are sub-separate, including Post Grad, are able to wear masks throughout the day and are adhering to social distancing guidelines
- Key Challenges: some buildings using air scrubbers; some students are unable to wear marks; lack of familiarity with staff from get well room; social distancing for some students

Dr. Morgan turned the meeting over to Dr. Karyn Grace and Shelagh Walker for part 3: Instruction

- Successes in-person: students are excited to be back, educator commitment, growth and or/maintenance of skills towards IEP, engaging in lessons academically with peers, providing opportunities for social-emotional growth, collaboration: special ed/gen ed collaboration
- Successes for remote: provision of services as documented in the student's IEP, parent consultation, weekly special education learning remote plans, educator creatively adapting instructional materials/improving their skills using online instructional strategies; Zoom-G-Suite tools & SeeSaw tool
- Key Challenges in-person: Grid B Services, transportation, student absences, only sub-separate and SEI programs in the building, time to complete all necessary paperwork
- Key Challenges remote: some families want to participate in a "a la carte" remote education; Family/Student/Staff Concerns for students unable to access remote learning; insufficient collaboration for key planning efforts; reassigning students to reduce class sizes; time to complete all necessary paperwork

Shelagh Walker turned the meeting over to special educators to share their experiences in the field

- Janet Forte, Amigos Special Educator shared that students are adhering to safety guidelines, concerned about the amount of time that students are waiting, lack of materials for students, and staffing
- Christine Leonard, Occupational Therapist, shared that her students have also adhered to safety guidelines and the benefits of being able to provide services in-person, shared her appreciation for the weekly COVID testing, expressed her concern of cohorts and overworking and the amount of paperwork

- Liza Gosselin, King Open Special Educator, she's doing both in-person/remote as a personal choice and discussed her concern of being in-person and the isolation, shared her appreciation of the COVID testing, not access to remote and can't come in person

Dr. Morgan turned the presentation over to Jean Spera to provide an update on staffing.

- What is working well: recovery team, professional learning, education collaboratives
- Key Challenges: Staff/student ration, time to collaborate with other key staff, substitute shortage, needs to temporarily fill permanent vacancies, some of our in-person teachers are also teaching remote learners

Jean Spera then discussed action plan moving forward

- Next phase: planning for limited in-person services for some students with IEPS
- Winter 2021: planning for expanded hybrid in-person services for students as well with IEPS

Member Wilson opened the meeting for public comment.

Karen Dobak asked in regards to students who are having trouble with accessing/using remote learning technology, could they be assigned a coach to help? Desiree Phillips discussed her potential ideas to address that issue, a proposed "crash course" on technology, the goal is to have small groups to come in-person.

Amatul Mahmud shared her experience as a virus recovery team member the pros were that she was known and to collaborate with teachers, the cons were that it's hard to maintain social distancing while testing and some students are not wearing masks-she wondered how these tests are going to be possible? Dr. Lietchensen provided that in a situation where a special educator is unable to maintain three foot distancing for unmasked, they should be a high priority for PPE. Amatul discussed further issues with administering the test. Dr. Lietchensen discussed adherence to OSS to the manual, and sanitize their hands and that with the door open there should be proper air exchanges. Jean Spera discussed a follow up. Mr. Maloney discussed the expediency of getting air scrubbers.

Dan Monahan discussed how there are still things to work out but things are getting better. Discussed one outstanding issue: the overwork of educators and if there has been a consideration of adding more staff or other ways to decrease the amount of paperwork? Dr. Alexis Morgan asked what progress can be made with the staff operationally then they might consider hiring more. Desiree Phillips let the Sub-Committee know that Dr. Morgan shares an update to the principals and that there was a recommendation to limit gen-ed responsibilities for OSS staff at this time. She also discussed the CPS caseload are the smallest in the state.

Member Wilson extended the meeting.

Dr. Lichtenstein shared that she heard that teachers are having problems with the grid b services and if there have been solutions. Shelagh Walker discussed the challenges and they are still making considerations.

Dr. Lichtenstein provided that "happy masks" have been effective in situations where students are having trouble masking. Member Wilson suggested a meeting between Dr. Lichtenstein to talk about effective masking options for students who are having difficulty with the masks.

Member Wilson opened the meeting up to other Sub-Committee members.

Member Rachel asked: why is transportation the hardest with masks, if there was some way to get less specialized support staff to help with the workload and discussed the importance of real-time communication with parents about room/teacher/school reassignments.

Member Weinstein asked what we are doing in preparation if schools close and then need to go remote. He also asked for clarification about the extended student absences and there are some scholars that might need to be out of the classroom and there is not a remote option, could there be a remote sub. Mayor Siddiqui and Member Wilson also echoed concern about the absences.

Member Wilson was happy to hear that students are wearing masks. She asked for further clarification on students running late/transportation and the “a la carte” remote and what the communication methods with families are.

Dr. Morgan answered the Member’s questions:

- Discussed how they have some students that have trouble wearing masks in any public setting.
- In regards to transportation, the delay could be caused by numerous things such as the driver still working out the route or in some instances if a parent opted in for the bus and then decided to keep their child home.
- They are preparing for what to do if the schools close and they all need to go remote
- They are not considering offering remote substitutes; if a child has to quarantine it’s a different story
- Desiree Phillips provided further context on students absenteeism and difficulty with masks
- Dr. Karyn Grace provided context on how they are dealing with students not wearing masks looking at it from different perspectives
- Shelagh Walker discussed how at the beginning of the year not wearing masks was a concern but they are making progress
- Jean Spera talked about kids not participating or attending and the importance of teams monitoring that and solutions

Zuleka Queen-Postell asked if there was a reason why in-person teachers are not creating a google classroom to allow for the option if a student is absent to log in. Dr. Karyn Grace discussed how this is a bigger district challenge and to have a broader conversation on this. Desiree Phillips clarified that the teachers are not unwilling to do this but it’s challenging with the instability: the option for back up remote for students in-person should not be a strategy.

Member Wilson announced that the next Sub-Committee will be November 18th, 2020. Member Wilson ended the meeting at 7:56 pm.

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