

Virtual Special Education & Student Supports Sub-Committee
Wednesday, September 30th, 2020
Broadcast from the Media Arts Studio
454 Broadway, Cambridge, MA

Called for the purpose of discussing the School Committee's contingency motion for in-person services for scholars on an IEP and how accommodations are met/adjusted for remote scholars. The meeting started at 6:00 pm.

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

Also Present: Dr. Morgan, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services; Jean Spera, Special Educator Director; Shelagh Walker; Dan Monahan, CEA President; Dr. Karyn Grace, District Coordinator of Inclusive Education, Instruction and Curriculum

Member Wilson shared the call of the meeting and outlined the structure of the meeting. Member Wilson opened the meeting for a presentation.

Dr. Morgan started her presentation "Remote Learning Presentation". She provided an update breakdown of the back to school timeline and restated the mission and vision of OSS. She discussed their approach to remote learning: Racial equity, student centered, relationships as foundational. She further discussed their two methods of providing services: 1) instruction and services 2) resources and supports. She discussed the fully Remote experience will incorporate family communication in weekly email and one on ones. Instruction and Services: Live structured lessons, prerecorded video lessons, student office hours. Resources and supports: Learning activities completed independently. She reviewed the expectations for the Remote Model with morning meetings, core class/specialized instruction and services, and specials class or subject. She presented how district-level support and consistency will be maintained.

Member Wilson opened the meeting for public comment.

Member Rachel asked Dr. Morgan to talk through what a sub-separate classroom would look like and how office hours are being communicated. Dr. Morgan provided that teachers will have access to ASPEN which will let them know families request. Dr. Morgan shared what the sub-separate classroom would look like and reported on the guidance from DESE, Public Health and others.

Member Rachel asked how we are thinking about reducing the transmission in pulling students out of classroom for supports. Dr. Morgan shared that first we need to ask if there is a possibility of remote services then the guidance is full PPE and social distancing and no limit on the number of students a service provider could see in a day. Desiree Phillips wanted to add that the upper school and high schools are also opening for a small number of students. The OSS are currently working with health and phys-ed and VPA department to figure out if any in-person specials will be an option there. Working out some of the stigma to attend gen-ed remote classes while at the school for services. Dr. Morgan added that at the elementary level there will be opportunities for interaction with peers within the pod model.

Lily Rayman-Read shared her perspective as an educator and clarified the hours in the advisory model. They are required to reach out to families once/twice and individual meetings with students on a regular basis. Then there are student support blocks/office from 2-3 pm and these periods are either voluntary or mandated, said we need to encourage students to come more.

Mercedes Soto asked what the process is for students significantly behind in reading in regards to screening: are they tracking engagement levels, how are we communicating process with caregivers/students and are we in communication with schools that been opened since September to learn best practices. Dr. Morgan provided an update that there are two working groups that out of district school representatives presented. Other district partners have started school in person and are hearing from them about their process also that they have Public Health officials on calls and providing training.

There were also district-wide training about supporting students who demonstrate difficulties with reading. Dr. Grace discussed how they were able to bring Mary Briggs on a refresher training and remote learning strategies and Orton Gillingham.

Dan Monahan asked for clarification on whether there were no limitations on connections with students in the building. Discussed his concerns over special educators visiting multiple schools that it creates a large cohort. If one of those educators were to test positive, it would shut down multiple schools. Dr. Morgan responded that they are trying to limit number so that each school has a core set of staff. Some accommodations will need to be made to address gaps. Dr. Morgan shared the goal is to provide these services remotely and that they are having a meeting tomorrow to gain clarity on the public health official's guidance.

Dan Monahan pointed out that a lot of services can't be done with 6 ft. distancing. Dr. Morgan provided clarity that the goal is to limit contact to under 15 minutes with full PPE and ventilation and that there is still more information needed before sharing with staff.

Member Wilson asked for further clarification on what the 15 minutes entails. Dr. Morgan said that the fifteen minutes is if they need to get closer than six feet.

Dan Monahan asked for clarification on whether there will there be training and how is the administration communicating to educators? Dr. Morgan shared that they are going to share the manual with school administrators and get feedback from them and there is another meeting tomorrow to discuss these pieces and ask the public health experts to share why this information was recommended. They also have conversations with OSS every two weeks (optional) to share information and new initiatives. They also can always post for more jobs, and in the interim there are agencies we are partnered with to fill in until someone is hired.

Member Wilson discussed the need to have experts in the meetings to help provide clarity.

Robyn Towner asked for an update on whether special educators will need to be remote/face to face/both? She wondered about families that request face to face meetings to discuss IEP. Dr. Morgan discussed family conferences, those decisions being made about whose coming in person is made by the IEP team. Discussed some of the staffing issues that are being negotiated with the CEA and that educators would be teaching either remote or in-person. She discussed how they will communicate with parents about potential differences in in-person and remote teachers.

Ellen Quinn shared her perspective as a special educator and asked for clarity on the use of technology. She shared that she feels as though special educator's voices need to be more included in the discussions. Dr. Morgan discussed how to get their voices more involved and discussed how the district is still making considerations about pods.

Ellen Quinn asked for further clarification on the pod system and on the limit of how many classrooms special educators are allowed to go into. Dr. Morgan discussed how the goal is to not to spread out our staff. She provided that the "pod" can be one or 2 classrooms and they share staff like the para-professional or the special educator.

Laura Egitto asked for clarification on serving for the B Grid remotely and B minute guidelines. Dr. Karyn Grace did not have a definitive answer to this grid model and there needs to be determination made on asynchronous activities meeting the needs of students.

Laura Egitto asked how can we collect data being remote and to see if the child is actually accessing it? Dr. Karyn Grace discussed the importance of discussing norms with families in consult and shared some creative ways to check-in with students.

Laura Egitto asked for further clarification on B-Grid. Dr. Karyn Grace discussed how they are still trying to figure it out.

Member Weinstein asked for an update about the safety facilities manual and how will services be delivered to students with IEPS if schools need to close.

Member Wilson extended the meeting for ten minutes.

Dr. Morgan discussed how they wanted to provide additional support to students with unique needs, not sure whether it has to be reviewed by school committee. The additional staff they are bringing on board to do the back log will be considered essential workers.

Shelagh Walker shared that Grid-B question is being asked of coordinators daily and they are working hard on this.

BValerio asked how can we keep the case load manageable in remote and in-person services with all the meetings and paperwork to fill out and advisory? Dr. Morgan discussed how OSS does not determine advisory caseload, it is a building decision by the principal and advised BValerio to speak with her principal.

Mary Londino shared some strategies around grid based services at her school.

Member Rachel provided an update that the facilities manual is coming to a vote this upcoming Tuesday and there will be more clarity on limitations of interactions and pull-out plans.

Member Wilson summarized issues brought up during this meeting: safety manual, office hour communications, laminating workers for younger scholars; how services are provided in-person/remote. She discussed how the October Sub-Committee will be focused on reading levels. Member Wilson ended the meeting at 7:36 pm.

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