

**CITY OF NORWALK
BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL EDUCATION AD-HOC COMMITTEE MEETING
MAY 10, 2016**

ATTENDANCE: Dr. Yvel Crevecoeur, Chair; Natalie Alonso, Dr. Michael Cicchetti
Jeffrey Spahr, Dr. Danyelle Williams

Call to Order

Dr. Crevecoeur called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. and stated that Committee members were in attendance as listed above. He outlined the format of the meeting would be a work session to share thoughts and concerns. He asked members to keep within the ten-minute time limit in order to have enough time for questions/answers and public comments.

Dr. Danyelle Williams

Dr. Williams spoke on the needs of Special Education instruction on behalf of the high schools. She outlined the complexity of the IEP and PPT and the roles that teachers and administrators play in the process. She reviewed the resources that are available and the manpower needed to complete the paperwork that is involved, and suggested that on-going training is needed to keep the procedures in compliance. Regarding staffing resources, the administration needs to understand that this is an area of shortage and recruiting qualified teachers is a challenge. She acknowledged efforts at college recruiting fairs such as U-Conn and added that the outreach should go beyond to encourage applicants and recruit those in the field of special education. In addition para-professionals play a key role in the support staff and providing resources necessary for the special programs to be effective.

Dr. Cicchetti

Dr. Cicchetti echoed the concerns on recruiting and added that candidates should be invited to observe and to look at the advantages of the Norwalk Public Schools district. He added that specific recruitment efforts should be done in response to the good resumes and the efforts at the U-Conn fairs is commendable.

Dr. Cicchetti spoke about the ARC program (Accelerated Route to Certification) and outlined that CREC has amended this to an AARC that offers teachers the opportunity to have a second area of certification in special education in one year:

PMT training is ongoing and there were 30 in attendance today with VCBA to become district trainers/coaches. There are week long training and summer training programs. He acknowledged that the complexities of the IEP and PPT and the roles that teachers and administrators play in the process to keep the procedures in compliance

Dr. Cicchetti spoke on the next step is to establish a strategy to prioritize steps:

- Start with organization structure. Revise standards and policy manual.
- After school work group sessions
- Best People – recruit – hire – train – retain – supervise – evaluate
- Administrative support to certified and support staff.
- Highly Qualified teaching – Professional Development Opportunities
- Specialized Instruction - Curriculum Development
- IEP Writing – PPT meetings –

Implementation strategies to build success:

- Parallel the above with parent/staff communications.
- SpEd Partner Meetings – Focus Groups – Dialogue structure up to new head.
- Hire own vs. contracted – Develop a stronger program
- Be smart on delivered instruction and consolidate resources.

Jeffrey Spahr

Mr. Spahr echoed Dr. Cicchetti's comments and noted that it is very difficult to prioritize areas. He stated that he wanted to comment from a parent focus point of view and noted that where there is an absence of communication is results in festering of mistrust. He shared his experience with a teacher back when his son was in elementary school who spoke in confidence that his son was not receiving the specialized Speech & Language instruction. He added that the explanation at the time was a lack of resources to evaluate outside services. There was a dialogue exchange of comments that this is one area that needs worked out where the IEP documents are measured especially when outside services are contracted and the district is not getting what it pays for.

Mr. Spahr spoke about the IDEA grant for programs that have parent sessions and seminars for teachers and specialized training for learning disabilities. He gave an example of the School Resource Officers that should be trained to communicate with special needs students to that they can distinguish between a disrespectful response to one of a lack of interpersonal communication skills. He spoke on PMT training and law enforcement restraint methods that are different for children and students.

Natalie Alonso

Ms. Alonso spoke on Dr. Cicchetti's list of priorities and recommendations #2 and #3 and noted a disparity in services from one building to another. She highlighted a lack of comparable services and described them as 19 kingdoms without a unified system for the district. She added that this results in out of district requests and intra-district placement requests from parents to reach out to meet the needs of their children. She gave examples of her own experience and those of other parents to illustrate the greater needs should be met.

Ms. Alonso spoke about the need for a manual for best practices for out placed students and shared where there are hick-ups in services provided. She gave examples of lack of speech and language services and a distinct gap of consistency throughout the school levels and buildings. She referred to parent sessions held by Pauline Smith where expectations were outlined and she would disseminate fliers to Sp.Ed. teachers and parents to establish direct communications.

Dr. Yvel Crevecoeur

Dr. Crevecoeur stated that he agreed with the comments and wanted to emphasize the following key points:

The need for out placed facility supervision and evaluation of services.

- The strategic plan calls for an administrator on site with evaluation and follow up.
- Methods of measures based on the IEP = definitions, goals and achievement.
- He added that the model is on line on the state website and ours is similar.
- Professional Development and Professional Growth are essential.

Dr. Cicchetti added that updates are in progress including a climate change and a welcoming and supportive atmosphere at Central Office. He added that there is some training and more is coming to follow.

Dr. Crevecoeur then asked if members of the public wished to speak.

Mr. Doug Geyer, 9 Mott Avenue spoke about communications and parent groups and asked what the channel is. He noted that there is staff and administration, but what is the trigger to start the chain.

Dr. Crevecoeur explained that some parents do not want to come forward and are intimidated. He suggested a survey may be the best way to reach them so they don't feel isolated.

Ms. Alonso spoke on the need for more than just a translator approach for the Hispanic parents. She added that they come from countries where special education is not an option and they are humble from a rule governed society and won't ask questions out of respect. She asked for workshops that explain and define the IEP and PPT and the roles that teachers and administrators play in the process and how parents can contribute.

Dr. Williams referred to the parent group started at Brien McMahon by the principal that grew into a parent-driven input group that came to seek information on their children. Topics were how to read a report card and how to get information on schedules and school events.

Dr. Cicchetti noted that the IDEA grant programs should provide access for parents, and we already know 85% of what a survey would reveal.

Public Comments – continued

Sue Haynie noted that communication is an island and all parents need to be addressed and in particular special education parents.

Nancy (no last name given)

There was discussion on how meetings are communicated and Dr. Cicchetti explained the process of the Website that is managed by Brenda Williams, Director of Communications.

Mr. Spahr offered to post things on FaceBook as well.

There was a dialogue exchange of comments that this is one area that needs worked out where the meetings are scheduled and there is outreach to parents.

It was noted this will be the agenda for the next meeting for further discussion and review.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Marilyn Knox,
Telesco Secretarial Services