

QUINCY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, January 15, 2014

A meeting of the Special Education Subcommittee was held on Wednesday, January 15, 2014 at 6:00 pm at Quincy High School. Present were Mr. Noel DiBona, Mrs. Kathryn Hubley, Ms. Barbara Isola, Mr. David McCarthy, and Mrs. Anne Mahoney, Chair. Also attending were Superintendent DeCristofaro, Mrs. Catherine Carey, Mrs. Kerri Connolly, Mr. Richard Kelly, Mrs. Maura Papile, Ms. Madeline Roy, Mr. Keith Segalla, Ms. Judy Todd, QPAC Board members Ms. Linda Perry, Ms. Carol Dumas, Ms. Cassandra Beck, Ms. Kate Campbell, Ms. Mia Hurld, interested parents, and Ms. Laura Owens, Clerk.

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 pm by Mrs. Mahoney. Ms. Todd updated progress towards meeting Special Education Program Improvement Plan goals. Scores are being tracked monthly for the Literacy goal; middle school Math goal is focused on professional development and curriculum alignment across the school system.

Mr. Keith Segalla and Ms. Todd presented the Aspen Student Information system, which was implemented district-wide in September. Over 1,000 staff members are trained to use Aspen; 4,800 middle and high school students are eligible to use the Student Portal, about 50% have logged on. Aspen modules currently in use are Fundamentals, Attendance, Scheduling, Assessment, Teacher Grade Book, State Reporting, plus the Student/Parent Portal. Teacher Pages will be rolled out in Spring 2014; Special Education, Professional Development, Curriculum & Learning modules will be implemented in September 2014.

The Aspen Student Portal provides access to student academic information, including assignments and grades, schedules, attendance. Ms. Isola asked for and received confirmation that parents are still required to call the school to excuse absent students. Interim and term grades must be posted in Aspen, but individual assignment or test grades are not required. Mrs. Mahoney asked for a survey to be conducted about teacher usage for the gradebook and whether additional training would assist in the transition.

The Aspen Special Education module allows general education teachers to access information about their own students. Teachers will provide accommodation information in their substitute folders by printing a simple report. Still to be explored are whether historical data and will be accessible through the parent portal.

Ms. Dumas asked about parent access to technology; Mr. Segalla said that last spring's student survey showed 82% of families had some type of at-home technology access. At this time,

Aspen is not accessible in other languages, but the company is considering a translation feature for a future version of the program. Mrs. Mahoney asked if we are transitioning away from printed interim reports and report cards. Mr. Segalla explained that beginning with the second term, these will be posted online and parents must request printed copies.

At this time, elementary report cards are not electronic, but as a new report card is developed, this will transition to Aspen as well. Students who move in from other school districts using Aspen have to be re-registered into our system. Out of district students are registered through Aspen, but the details of their records reside at the schools where they are registered. Mrs. Mahoney suggested that we ask other districts about what strategies and best practices they may have used to encourage teachers, parents, and students to fully utilize Aspen.

Dr. Christopher Denning from UMass Boston presented an update on the Young Athletes Program that is underway at the Della Chiesa Early Childhood Center. The Young Athletes program supports the development of gross motor skills for children with disabilities. In Quincy, students made average gains of 11 months over a 3-month period. Object manipulation is a particular challenge for children on the spectrum because these are integrated with social skills. The team is beginning to track gains in social skills through video documentation.

Ms. Perry asked if this program is something that would be appropriate for younger children and suggested collaborating with Head Start. Dr. Denning said there would also be advantages for implementing the program at elementary schools. Ms. Beck asked about using the curriculum with playgroups and Dr. Denning said that other researchers are working on a grant to expand into outside of school use. The curriculum was originally developed by the Special Olympics program and may be accessible online.

Ms. Todd shared the Special Education Department newsletter that highlights the department events and initiatives. The Guarino Family is once again hosting a fundraiser on April 11 at the Sons of Italy to fund mini-grants for Special Education teachers. Donations of raffle and silent auction items are welcome, as are volunteers to help plan and host the event. Mrs. Hubley noted that there is a Facebook page set up for the event.

QPAC announced that the Resource Fair will be held March 29 from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm; invitations have been sent out to potential participants. The Parent to Parent meeting will be January 23; an IEP Workshop will be held on January 24; and the monthly Workshop will be January 27. All meetings and workshops will be held in the QPAC Resource Room.

From the most recent QPAC meeting, questions were asked about the allocation of resources and how decisions are made for such services as Special Education therapists and resource room teachers. Another question requested information on assessing student progress in general education classrooms. Ms. Perry asked if the Parent Academy planned for March could include information on Assessments for Special Education students.

Mrs. Mahoney announced that the next meeting Special Education Subcommittee Meeting is March 26, 2014. Items brought forward from the QPAC monthly meeting will be agenda items for upcoming meetings.

Mrs. Mahoney made a motion to adjourn the Special Education Subcommittee Meeting at 7:35 pm. Mr. McCarthy seconded the motion and on a voice vote, the ayes have it.