

QUINCY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING

Wednesday, March 26, 2014

A meeting of the Special Education Subcommittee was held on Wednesday, March 26, 2014 at 6:00 pm at Quincy High School. Present were Mr. Noel DiBona, Mr. David McCarthy, and Mrs. Anne Mahoney, Chair. Also attending were Superintendent DeCristofaro, Deputy Superintendent Kevin Mulvey, Mrs. Diane Babcock, Mrs. Catherine Carey, Ms. Denise Carloni, Mrs. Donna Cunningham, Mrs. Lauren Ryan Guerro, Mr. Richard Kelly, Ms. Emily Markarian, Ms. Laura McCarthy, Mrs. Kerri Olore, Mrs. Maura Papile, Ms. Katie Pinch, Ms. Madeline Roy, Ms. Laura Thom, Ms. Judy Todd; Quincy Parent Advisory Council to Special Education Board Members Ms. Beck, Ms. Campbell, and Ms. Hurlid; and Ms. Laura Owens, Clerk.

The Language Development Program staff from Snug Harbor and Atherton Hough provided an overview of their program, noting that one in seven students have a learning disability and 85% of those students have a range of difficulties related to the understanding and use of expressive and receptive language. This hinders their ability to access the general curriculum and specialized instruction and/or interventions are essential for progress. The Language Development Program utilizes multisensory methodology across the curriculum. All LDC staff have received Orton Gillingham training and extensive professional development.

Snug Harbor hosts the Kindergarten LDC classes, while at Atherton Hough, there are grade-level classes for grades 1-2, 3, 4, 5. Inclusion opportunities are more numerous with single -grade classes, the LDC teachers collaborate with the grade level teams. At the middle school level, the students are at Broad Meadows, staying with their elementary school friends. At the high school level, Quincy High School provides the structure of the PACE program.

There are three different curricula options in the LDC program, each used with constant progress monitoring. The Read Well program is a reading program incorporating oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. Pacing is dependent on the student and there are options for customization. All genres are represented and complimentary materials are easily integrated. Mrs. Babcock noted that student academic success often alleviates behavioral issues and sees students who were previously two and three grade levels below who are now working at close to on-grade capacity.

Another curriculum option is Language!, a comprehensive literacy program with phonemic awareness and phonics, word recognition and spelling, vocabulary and morphology, grammar and usage, listening and reading comprehension, speaking and writing.

The Orton Gillingham method is language-based and success-oriented. The student is directly taught reading, handwriting, and written expression as one logical body of knowledge. Learners move step by step from simple to more complex materials. Teachers' ability to instruct has been greatly improved by the training, even those who don't do the pullout teaching. This is an approach that is diagnostic and prescriptive (100% individualized to the student and their ability); direct and explicit instruction in a prescribed sequence. Students learn the rules of the English language and the exceptions to the rules. Instruction is multi-sensory, reading, speaking, writing; spiral review is critical and mastered skills are built upon in subsequent lessons.

Assessments are constant through the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP), Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), and Orton Gillingham Informal Inventory. The CTOPP is a normed test by age (5-6 year olds; 7 and up) and assesses phonological awareness, phonological memory, and rapid naming. Phonological awareness refers to an individual's awareness of and access to the sounds structure of oral language. The Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) is administered from K-3/4 and teachers use it to analyze strengths and weaknesses in terms of accuracy, comprehension, and fluency. DRA allows LDC teachers to instruct students at their precise independent reading level.

Progress comes through practice, collaboration, progress monitoring, assessment, communication, appropriate instruction to build skill areas, nurture student strengths and self-esteem, develop positive school experience, and work as a team between school and home. The goal of the LDC program is to provide skills and strategies that allow students to transition into the general education population: student success is teacher success. Mrs. Babcock concluded the presentation by thanking Ms. Todd and the School Committee for the opportunity to share the program overview with them and for providing the staff, curriculum, and professional development.

Mr. McCarthy thanked the presenters for their enthusiasm, about the interactions and supports and great progress. School Committee knows of and appreciates their hard work. Mr. DiBona appreciates the teachers' passion for their work and their collaboration. Mrs. Mahoney asked for data on how many students: approximately 60 at the elementary level; 50 at middle school (in three classes). Mrs. Babcock said that within LDC program, there are Student Support Team meetings and students who are not progressing will have their interventions adjusted, including moving into other programs. Mrs. Mahoney complimented the Orton Gillingham program implementation. Ms. Carloni said that Quincy Public Schools is one of the few school systems with programs for all of the different Special Education strands. Ms. Todd said that the LDC staff are an incredible team. Mrs. Babcock and Ms. Olore emphasized the value of the paraprofessionals to their classes and requested professional development for those staff members. Ms. Olore emphasized the LDC team bond and Ms. Todd is a

key support, the Special Education department is always there. Ms. Olore said that besides these three main interventions, there are dozens of other interventions. Mrs. Mahoney said that parents need to know that there are opportunities in QPS to support the struggling student.

Dr. DeCristofaro was very impressed by the team presentation; these teachers have a positive impact on children and families; it can be very difficult for parents to decide for students to move to a citywide program, and the teachers care for and nurture the students. He loves to visit these classrooms where the happy students speak volumes about their work.

After a brief recess, Dr. DeCristofaro reviewed the Budget Development Process, distributing the model for determining priorities: beginning with Academic Classroom Teachers and Academic Programs (Special Education, ELL, Literacy), followed by Academic Support (Student Support Services, Health Services, Psychologists, Paraprofessionals), and Non-Academic Support. Once the Mayor provides the budget bottom line, there is a series of Budget & Finance Subcommittee meetings, where the Superintendent's Leadership Team presents recommendations and School Committee assesses and requests additional information. All items are discussed, including academic and non-academic expenses. Ms. Todd noted that Special Education is a mandated service and that support is clearly delineated. Programs and school-based supports are tracked all year long, for the new budget, staff placements are analyzed with the shifting student populations. Principals and team administrators are advocates for their buildings; staffing has consistently increased over the last five years. Special Education is funded through the QPS budget and several grants. Ms. Campbell asked about push-in services in classrooms. Ms. Todd said that this is not a budget issue, but a programmatic choice. Mr. McCarthy wondered whether the Resource Room provides more individual attention. Dr. DeCristofaro said Special Education issues are unique to each student and inclusion is done wherever appropriate. Ms. Todd will discuss the issue with the Principal Team.

Mrs. Mahoney stressed that IEPs are individualized and that these issues are not limited to a particular school, parents are trying to figure out the balance of assisting their student. She recommended that parents work with the team to make the appropriate decision for their child. Mr. McCarthy asked about instructional time conflict, can specialist time be used for Resource Room. Ms. Beck asked if students are given makeup time if they miss instruction. Ms. Todd said that teachers are very conscious of this and work with students to assist in getting them up to speed. Dr. DeCristofaro said in the last few years, elementary student schedules have been better addressed.

Ms. Todd said that in terms of Progress Monitoring, the elementary Resource Room teachers are utilizing DIBELS most months, in partnership with the Literacy Teachers. Every teacher will be administering two DDMs beginning next year, some will be program-based assessments.

Ms. Beck then presented a QPAC Update, noting that there would be a Parent Support Meeting on March 27 at 7:00 pm at Quincy High School. The QPAC Resource Fair will be held on Saturday, March 29 from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm at Quincy High School. Over 30 organizations are confirmed to be attending the event and QPAC is very pleased with the mix of agencies represented to assist students and families. Mr. McCarthy asked whether the Resource Fair was being advertised on the Quincy High School electronic sign. Ms. Beck will contact Ms. Todd about sending out an Instant Alert.

QPAC Goals are continuing to be focused on recruiting new board members, and they are looking to replace Outreach Coordinator who is stepping down. Ms. Perry and Ms. Dumas are also leaving at the end of the year as their children are graduating.

For Parent Concerns, on a global level, Ms. Beck noted no concerns. Most QPAC assistance has been on individual issues, assisting parents who are new to the process. Ms. Campbell asked about steps for requesting mediation and Ms. Beck will follow up with that information. Ms. Beck said that the Special Education Team Administrators have been wonderful in advocating and working with families.

Mrs. Nabstedt is concerned that there are no inclusion classes in Grades 11 and 12. Ms. Todd said that is a programmatic decision and resources are focused on Grades 9 and 10 to support students in transitioning. Mrs. Nabstedt will follow up with Dr. DeCristofaro about a letter from the English Department about the program of study.

Mr. McCarthy made a motion to adjourn the Special Education Subcommittee meeting at 7:45 pm. Mr. DiBona seconded the motion and on a voice vote, the ayes have it.