

QUINCY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING ~ Wednesday, March 23, 2016

A meeting of the Special Education Subcommittee was held on Wednesday, March 23, 2016 at 6:00 pm at the Coddington Building. Present were Mr. James DeAmicis, Ms. Barbara Isola, Mrs. Emily Lebo, and Mrs. Anne Mahoney, Chair. Also attending were Superintendent Richard DeCristofaro, Mrs. Catherine Carey, Mrs. Donna Cunningham, Ms. Katherine Ell, Mr. Daniel Gilbert, Ms. Julie Graham, Mr. Richard Kelly, Deputy Superintendent Kevin Mulvey, Mrs. Maura Papile, Mrs. Erin Perkins, Ms. Lina Subatis, Ms. Judy Todd; Quincy Parent Advisory Council to Special Education Board Members Ms. Beck, Ms. Hurlid, Ms. Nabstedt; Citywide Parent Council Co-President Scott Alessandro; and Ms. Laura Owens, Clerk.

Ms. Todd reviewed the dyslexia legislation currently in Massachusetts Legislative Committees in both the House and Senate. The legislation suggests screening no later than the first semester of Grade 2 and calls for the Department of Elementary & Secondary Education to develop screening procedures and identify screening instruments. Ms. Todd noted that Quincy Public Schools begins screening students through the Kindergarten registration process and throughout elementary school grades.

Mrs. Perkins reviewed the Response to Intervention (RTI) model for grades K through 5, Tier 1 (instruction within the classroom); Tier 2 (differentiated guided reading groups within the classroom and additional literacy support); Tier 3 (literacy support outside of the classroom and/or special education services). At Integrated Learning Team meetings, progress is monitored through analysis of benchmark, formative, and criterion reference assessments. Students identified as being at risk begin to receive interventions. If progress is not demonstrated, changes to interventions are made. At subsequent ILT meetings, interventions will be adjusted, including referrals for Special Education.

Mrs. Perkins reviewed assessments currently being used to screen for dyslexia. Mrs. Perkins said there are multiple assessments in place to “catch” as many students in danger of not progressing. Through progress monitoring, student performance growth both in words correct and accuracy is plotted and analyzed to ensure that students are showing appropriate growth. Mr. Alessandro asked about how norms are defined. Mrs. Perkins said many are nationally-normed based on research and field tests. Others are criterion-referenced, and the levels defined by the test developer.

Mrs. Lebo asked which students use Lexia; Grades Pre-K-5 Special Education, Literacy, and ELL students.. Lexia can also be used at home and we are working on expanding awareness of this program in and out of school. Currently, it is most commonly used as a small group activity in the Literacy or Resource Room setting. Ms. Isola asked how we ensure that students have online access to Lexia. Ms. Todd said that this is factored into individual education plans, students without home access could be given time on Lexia during the Library Support block, for example.

Mrs. Perkins shared the range of Literacy Interventions for Phonemic Awareness, Phonics, Fluency, Vocabulary, and Comprehension. Ms. Todd reviewed that Orton-Gillingham trained teachers are on staff in every elementary school in substantially-separate Special Education programs, Resource Rooms and Literacy program. As with Literacy, a variety of programs are used to individualize instruction as needed for phonics, fluency, spelling, core reading, and writing.

Resource Room teachers Ms. Ell and Ms. Subatis shared their perspective of the changes in Special Education over the last 20+ years. In the early days, there was no special curriculum, teachers modified standard curriculum as needed and created materials individually. So much has changed and strides have been made to keep students in regular education classes with supports as much as possible. As instructional theory has evolved, the idea of giving students time to catch up has given way to assessment, interventions, data analysis, and immediate student support.

Mr. Blaton asked where parents fit into the cycle of evaluation and suggested a parent questionnaire. Mrs. Lebo asked the percentage of evaluations initiated by professional staff versus parents. Ms. Todd said she is in the process of developing an indicator for the state. Ms. Todd said that at the elementary school level, most referrals are from professional staff. Ms. Todd will explore this further at the May 25 Special Education Subcommittee meeting.

Ms. Ollman and Ms. O'Brien both spoke about their work with the legislative task force and positive support from QPS staff and administrators for their own students. Mrs. Mahoney suggested a follow-up meeting on this topic to explore opportunities for parent and community education. Mrs. Lebo reminded all that QPAC meetings are for parents to convene with specific questions on Special Education issues.

Mrs. Mahoney asked Ms. Beck and Ms. Nabstedt to present the QPAC update. Ms. Beck said that QPAC's goal is to increase parent involvement, general parent concerns to share with School Committee will come from individual parents. Ms. Beck said the recent Sensory Night was a successful parent/child event. Middle school STARS students will be getting a behind-the-scenes tour of Wahlburgers in late April. Ms. Beck said that the lack of QPAC website is an ongoing area of concern, QPAC would welcome volunteers to assist with developing content for a new website.

Ms. Todd requested that the Landmark Writing presentation be moved to the next Special Education Subcommittee meeting agenda. Mrs. Mahoney said that at the May 25 meeting, there will also be a review of high school Special Education. Mrs. Campbell asked for an update on filling Ms. Todd's position following her retirement. Mrs. Lebo suggested that a parent be part of the staffing discussion. Dr. DeCristofaro said a timeline will be forthcoming.

Mrs. Lebo made a motion to adjourn at 7:30 pm, seconded by Mr. DeAmicis. On a voice vote, the ayes have it.