

QUINCY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING ~ Wednesday, April 6, 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, Mrs. Emily Lebo, and Mrs. Anne Mahoney, Chair. Also attending were Superintendent Richard DeCristofaro, Mrs. Erin Perkins, Ms. Judy Todd; Quincy Parent Advisory Council to Special Education President Ms. Nabstedt; and Ms. Laura Owens, Clerk.

Ms. Todd and Mrs. Perkins began by summarizing the Integrated Learning Team and progress-monitoring process and referrals for Special Education. Mrs. Mahoney asked when Special Education referrals begin, at 2.6 years old through the preschool sites. Mrs. Perkins said Kindergarten students are all screened in May prior to the start of school year; all elementary grades are administered DIBELS in September. DIBELS has set benchmarks for each of the three administrations per year (September, January, May). Mrs. Lebo said since students are at different developmental levels, it may take a little time for language development issues to surface. Mrs. Perkins said that in Kindergarten, a common red flag is for a student who cannot recognize their own name in print or write their own name. Mrs. Perkins said that student would be referred for Literacy support (with parent permission) and their incremental progress tracked for the next 6-8 weeks. Lack of progress would drive a reconsideration of the intervention, possibly referral for Special Education/IEP process. Mrs. Mahoney said that parents would be able to request additional intervention at any stage.

A parent asked when students with language development issues compensate, how does Quincy Public Schools prevent these students from falling behind and missing out on foundational skills. Mrs. Mahoney asked if QPS looks at statistics of at what age students are identified with language development issues. Ms. Todd said over her career, more and more students are being picked up in Kindergarten and Grade 1. Mrs. Perkins said there is always room for improvement, students with dyslexia are often very bright and develop compensation skills, especially memorization. Typically, these students' issues become apparent in Grade 3 when reading in the content areas becomes more difficult. Mrs. Perkins said that close analysis of writing by teachers, especially for spelling is surfacing students earlier. Mrs. Mahoney said parents are sometimes concerned because they may be told that accurate spelling will come later. Mrs. Perkins said it is more about spelling patterns, not specific word accuracy. For example, in Grade 1, students should know that all words have vowels. Mrs. Perkins said that letter reversals are common through Grade 1.

Mrs. Lebo asked about the DIBELS Next, Mrs. Perkins said this newer version is two years old and has much more difficult benchmarks. The nonsense words section of DIBELS will identify students who are memorizing, they will not be able to decode these words in isolation and without context clues. Mrs. Lebo noted that there will be new assessment tools developed as a result of this legislation.

Mrs. Mahoney said that Special Education is a massive concept, so many different diagnoses. Students with learning issues feel different in the classroom, and individualized education is the goal for all students. Mrs. Lebo said that parents have expressed concern that teachers say students should work harder when they may have an undiagnosed language-based issue.

Mrs. Ollman shared a clip from *Chronicle* on the pending legislation (www.wcvb.com). The sponsoring legislators feel that this investment in young students will pay dividends as more students will be able to graduate from high school, attend higher education or advanced job training, and achieve more in their lives. This is an early intervention for a successful life; Mrs. O'Brien said from her work in the health care field, illiteracy puts children and adults at risk for depression, addiction, and chronic illnesses.

Mrs. Mahoney said that Quincy Public Schools and the School Committee are committed to continuing the conversation. Mrs. Mahoney asked if there were other ways parents can support the legislation. Mr. DeAmicis said Citywide has prepared an email template that parents can use to send to their legislators in support of the bills. Ms. O'Brien said parents should email the Committee On Education, Representative Sonia Chang-Diaz is the Chair.

Mrs. Mahoney said that a Parent Academy (or series) on this topic would be helpful in sharing information. Mrs. Lebo suggested creating a parent help sheet – if you are seeing this at home, please contact your child's teacher, guidance counselor, or principal. Mrs. Mahoney said something like this might be helpful to share with the letter referring students for Literacy services. Dr. DeCristofaro said along with educating parents, additional professional development for staff is important. Dr. DeCristofaro said we have success stories and sharing those with parents at the beginning of the Special Education process would be helpful. Ms. O'Brien said we all have the same goal which is to help students become productive citizens.

Mrs. Mahoney suggested that the parent group for Dyslexia awareness align with QPAC. Mrs. Mahoney said that QPAC's regularly scheduled meetings offer a format for parents expressing their concerns and the alignment with the School Committee Special Education Subcommittee.

For next steps, Dr. DeCristofaro suggested that a small group meet to prioritize the topics and plan a series of Parent Academy events. Mrs. Lebo said since this is constantly changing field, these presentations will need to be consistently updated. Mrs. Mahoney said if we can continue to work together, we can make a difference for students.

Mrs. Lebo made a motion to adjourn at 7:00 pm, seconded by Mr. DeAmicis. On a voice vote, the ayes have it.