

SEPAC Meeting Minutes 11/29/18  
Location Chelmsford High School, Learning Commons

Board Members Present 3

Ali Barnes, co-chair

Kristen Eriksen, co-chair

Jane Zhao, treasurer

Director of Student Services, Amy Reese, present

Assistant Director of Student Services, Amy Matson, not present

School Committee Liaison, Donna Newcombe, present

Other members: Approximately 10-12 present

Handouts: Agenda, meeting minutes from Nov 1st Bylaw Subcommittee meeting, proposed new SEPAC Bylaws, Handouts from Life Links, Preliminary Survey Results

Meeting called to order by Ali Barnes at 7:02 PM, and she noted that 3 Board members were present, along with Amy Reese from Student Services, and Donna Newcomb from the school committee.

**Agenda item: listed in accordance to posted agenda sheet format**

1. **Approve minutes from Oct 25, 2018:** Minutes of Oct 25th meeting not ready yet.
2. **Liaison Reports:** Please note that the role of liaison can be filled at any time. We will continue accepting volunteers as long as there are spots open.

Tonight we have one person offering to take position of liaison. The board recognizes Haral Patel as volunteer for SEPAC liaison to Chips and appoints her to the position for the 2018-2019 school year:

CHIPS: nothing to report

Byam: Cara was not at last BSA meeting. Amy Domow asking if SEPAC would like to have ZEN DEN at Byam sweetheart dance on Feb 1st starts at 5:30. SEPAC could do this.

Center: nothing to report

Harrington: Jaimie: SEPAC planning to have a table at the upcoming Heritage Festival Jan 30, 5:30-7:30

South Row: no liaison

McCarthy: no liaison

Parker: no liaison

CHS: nothing to report

**3. Guest Speaker: Peg Ricardo, Family Support Services at LifeLinks, Inc**

Peg is a family support case manager. Lifelinks is funded by the Department of Developmental Services for ages 3-adult. Person needs an official disability and diagnosis. Provides a lot of autism services, services for children with Downe Syndrome. Pre eligibility, families are still encouraged to call for assistance with application process. Main goal is to keep child at home, out of residential care. They host workshops and events re many topics including special needs trusts, housing for adults. They have music therapy classes at no cost, other classes and social events for eligible families, Specialty programs for children with intense medical needs, a day program, transportation (at times). Small program for children on the autism spectrum without intellectual disabilities, limited services through Mass Rehab Commission. All members need to reapply at age 17 for adult services, services are NOT income based. Peg recommends applying before you may even feel that you need them, so that then they have your

information and when you call in a pickle, they can quickly help you find resources. She will get links together and share with us via email.

Thank you for your time and information!

4. **Public Input:** The floor will now open for public input. Is there anyone who has topics to discuss or information to share? None.
5. **School Committee Report - Donna Newcomb**  
Thank you for making time to be here tonight. Is there anything that you would like to share or discuss with the group?
  - a. One to one learning initiative committee: a team including administration, superintendent, teachers (both gen ed and Sped teachers) parents, IT for chrome books for all students. They meet every 2 weeks, established a mission, Are debating or planning to start with 5th grade and 9th grade, would then take 4 years to roll out. Considering cost, curriculum, use, security, policy, delivery of instruction, researching what other towns do.
  - b. Public forum for parents re extended year learning, aka "blizzard bags" and later start time for HS to be held in January or February. A committee has been formed re this that includes Dr Hirsch and Amy Reese.
  - c. School Committee Goals are currently being worked on, they are investigating the need for and potential budget for child with language based learning disability.
  - d. Revised student activity account audit: Revised all new policies on line then can roll out student activities.
  - e. Developed an employee handbook, and developing a school committee employee handbook
  - f. Tri-board meeting in 2 weeks: School committee, selectmen, and finance committee all meet to discuss the "state of Chelmsford" as we move into the budget season.
  - g. Chelmsford has tried unsuccessfully to get much state aid, but this means we are pretty level funded, not relying on the ups and downs of amounts of state aid which changes.

6. **Student Services Report:** Amy Reese

Budget: Amy Reese has met with schools/principals to discuss staff swapping. Met with district administration (Administration, program leads, building leads to discuss priorities for next year. D Newcomb praised Dr Lang's financial management to continue growth even if we are level funded. Next steps, are to determine the needs/priorities for schools, SPED, programming. A Reese states that the principals work together very collaboratively. Explains that the middle and high school principals were very supportive of getting assistant principals for elementary school. Now that the STRIVE program was added at South Row, it has already been refined. A possible goal is to now refine the programs at middle and high school (which all have different names-SAPP, MAPP) Possibly change names for uniformity. This is a goal to be implemented possibly by the end of the summer.

A Barnes asked if there was any plan to get descriptions of all the programs, as well as refining entrance and exit criteria, and if these are explained to families who are considering moving into the district. The guidelines currently state: Participating in the Planning, Development, and Evaluation of Special Education Programs. What is your plan for including parents?

\*\* A question that determines where people live is "how is the school system?" and being organized, being open, being realistic about people wanting to understand how their tax dollars are spent in the school system is a good thing, making the programs transparent and known

within the community promotes an atmosphere of trust and will make parents want to move to chelmsford.

Simply having a program will not make the majority of people go window shopping for what they want. It will be a selling point for chelmsford, people will be able to say - with confidence - "our school district has a program that meets the needs of children with \_\_\_\_\_, you can look up the definitions & entrance/exit criteria here" -Right now, we don't have that.

Amy Reese replied "I don't go into great detail to sell our programs because then if they decide to move into town, that is a big burden on our budget."

J Zhao asked if we should request to increase our budget. D Newcomb recommends making a request to school committee and explain what the money would be used for. A Reese states that the SPED department also has some flexibility to provide us some funds if we need it. This will also be a part of our upcoming school committee presentation.

**7. Parent Support Group Update:** Laurie McCarron Presented, included the PSG Newsletter. They continue with monthly meetings, now one during a weekday, and one in the evening. Had last meeting at the REC center. Some members felt uncomfortable in a public place. Evening PSG is at a parents home, Kendra Barbanti offered to have the daytime one at her home if that would help. Sensory Friendly Night at Roller Kingdom temporarily on hold. PSG plans to have an event in the spring (Advocates to look at IEP's?) This had been suggested to do through SEPAC, but for confidentiality purposes and fear of possible retaliation by the district, anything of this nature would be done by PSG and not SEPAC.

- Topics of Interest: Frustration re adaptive equipment recommendations. Request for more social opportunities through SEPAC to help connect parents and children. Differences between working with CPS and Innovation Academy, and transition assistance for high school and Nashoba Tech
- Topics of Concern : Bullying, how teachers speak to struggling students in front of the class or after class with other teachers, but during the school day when students are in the hallway or at lockers and can hear conversation. Kids melting down at home after being able to hold it together all day at school. Sex offenders in Chelmsford, how to approach safety with our kids re this, social media awareness and self defense options.
- News and Updates: Next AM meeting Tue 1/22 10:30 at the REC center in Chelmsford. Next PM meeting 1/11 at 7 PM, location posted in private CSNPSG Facebook group.

## **8. Old Business**

a. Voting on Bylaw Proposal - Meeting planned at last SEPAC meeting, scheduled then, and K Eriksen and A Barnes met in posted meeting to consolidate old bylaws, review old and first draft done last year by L McCarron, and put resulting bylaws into a standard template. Note changes or additions

- Is there a motion to open the floor for discussion?  
Motion by K Barbanti, seconded by A Domow.

- The floor is now open.

Is there any specific input for the mission statement or purpose?

Voting membership - the way it is written is exclusive to parents that have children currently placed out of district. I feel that those parents should be included. Their input is necessary as their child may return to the district or their feedback could help shape programming/services so that fewer children need OOD placements.

"Voting Membership shall be open to parents/guardians of children with special needs who either live in Chelmsford or have a child attending CPS" It is required that a vote carry with  $\frac{2}{3}$  majority to amend the bylaws. Voting members are parents/guardians of children with special needs.

Any input, questions or feedback? Suggest to revise or review at least every 3 years. Art 6-2 establish a nomination committee to oversee elections. No other changes.

Put to a vote: 8 voting members present, unanimous vote in favor, 0 against, 0 abstaining.

**b. Needs Assessment Survey Subcommittee: Preliminary Results - Amy Domow**

Survey was sent out as planned, will stay open until first week of December. 225 returned (have 850 on IEP's) Amy picked out some of her graphs to highlight some results, show how certain graphs look and will have final results and meeting minutes for Jan SEPAC meeting. Looks great so far, and we have had good number of replies so far. Will have to discuss again at Jan meeting to go over the results, consider how the information can be used to inform sepac decisions and the recommendations that will be made in the sc presentation

Thank you, Amy and Jamie.

c. Establish School Committee Presentation Subcommittee - Motion made to create a subcommittee to assist in developing the presentation for the School Committee by CD, seconded by AD. Volunteers can email the SEPAC email. First meeting tentatively scheduled for 12/11. Vote unanimous.

## **9. New Business**

**a. SEPAC Email Changes: Statement about the changes that were made (forwarding):**

- Changes were made to the SEPAC email by Bill Silver, CPS IT dept. SEPAC email was forwarded to Amy Reese The changes were made without notice.
- SEPAC email is forwarded to Amy Reese for the purpose of screening for possible virus, malware, and spam that could cause problems in the email server. The reasons it is forwarded to Amy Reese is that
  - (1) she is an employee in the district who is familiar with the content typically included in PAC email.
  - (2) The email is accessed by Kristen & Ali, who are not employees. In the past, emails that serve groups of people are sometimes not checked for weeks at a time and that can reportedly cause issues.
- Email forwarding is a condition of using PAC email on the CPS server.
- Reminder that it is public information (OML & FOIA)
- Discussion: One of the most important first goals that Chelmsford SEPAC has had is to build a collaborative relationship with administration and school committee. We are a well established entity now, and need to be taken seriously as such. We need to be able to trust administration and SC, and administration and SC need to trust us as well. It was, frankly, a bit alarming to open the SEPAC email one day to see a new message stating that all our emails were forwarded to the Director of Student Services. A Reese states that she spoke with Bill Silver, and he apologized for making that quick decision without consulting anyone first. SEPAC can opt to set up alternate email that would still be subject to OML & FOIA. We'd need to research what that entails and present that information at January's meeting. Ali will do that.

**b. Review of SEPAC Goals**

- Provide SEPAC community outreach at Open House - DONE!
- Host True Colors Workshop - DONE!
- Complete Special Education Needs Assessment Survey - IN PROCESS!
- Continue building a collaborative relationship with PTO and BSA groups - IN PROCESS! Includes the CoCS
- **Continue building a collaborative relationship with administration and school committee.**  
True colors was a good first step.

Attend A.P.P.L.E. Institute was one of the PAC goals laid out in the sc presentation last spring  
Apply for ALEC Grant - The process is just starting. We have a parent volunteer who will be coordinating this effort. That needs to be part of our discussions. requires a bit of research bf moving forward

Input for planning chromebook 1:1 initiative

I've reached out to Bill Silver about being included in this. I've been invited to attend meetings, but the last that I know of was at 330 in the afternoon and that isn't possible for me. If there is anyone else who is familiar with assistive technology and/or chromebooks please shoot me an email with your interest so we can collaborate.

Input for the defined programs with in the district - ties back to Amy' Rs update

**SEPAC Goals: Establish SEPAC guidelines for open dialogue between parents and collaborative dialogue with the District**

- A major purpose of the pac is to help inform parents of their rights and educate them of the laws so that they have informed discussions with the school. Parents that come to a meeting that are educated in the processes of special education, should be making meetings more efficient and helping to determine goals & objectives that best suit a child's individual needs. The district should be excited that that is an active SEPAC, because if parents are speaking the same language, know the same rules & expectations for meetings, and know what is supposed to happen for their child & when, then the district will have a streamlined special education department that meets that meets the needs of all children. Services will be provided at the optimal time, (before a child is allowed to fail.) Money will be saved by both the district & parents because there will be fewer meetings in mediation and hearings with BSEA. Criteria on the CPR will be fully implemented.
- This is similar to going to IEP or 504 meetings. If you don't speak the language or know what to do and when, then things are missed, assumptions are made, and choices are made that might not be the best for the child.
- need to build trust and that is going to happen if we are all speaking the same language.

It has been brought to our attention that there are concerns that SEPAC support and parent training may not be reaching the families that are in the most need, whether that is due to inability to attend meetings/events, a language barrier, financial, educational, or other barrier. We will be able to use some of the data from the survey (while realizing those are the families that likely did not participate) to identify where that need may be, but we should also look to collaboration with the newly forming ESL PAC.

- Currently, we have a lot of information that is online, with some information available in print at the public library.
- Need to brainstorm ways to reach those parents that do not know what SEPAC is or that resources are available to help them

District: The district does not support a parent:parent IEP review. There will be liability issues if parents tell each other incorrect information and they do not support SEPAC hosting the event. I suggested that we coordinate it with an advocate or lawyer so that questions could be answered correctly, and the Director of Student Services said that the district isn't going to pay anyone to help parents "fight" with them.

We will share the idea with parent support group to see if they would be interested.

#### **10. New Items Expected for January**

- a. Needs Assessment Survey Presentation
- b. Workshop: An IEP for My Child, January 15, 645PM, Chelmsford Public Library
- C. Laurie McCarron volunteered to take back secretary position on SEPAC Board.

*There being no further business to come before the board, the meeting is adjourned at 9:28pm*