

Curriculum Subcommittee Meeting Minutes
November 21, 2016
30 Common Street, Innovation Lab

Present: Eileen Hsu-Balzer (Chair), Kendra Foley, Candace Miller, John Portz, John Brackett, Kathleen Desmarais, Barbara Gortych, Theresa McGuinness, member of the public

Chairman called the meeting to order at 4:00 PM. Ms. Desmarais went through and responded to the EDCO report on WPS' Special Education program. Every three years the law requires us to review our SPED program. Our self-assessment tool for the department will be due at the end of FY17. There will also be a five-day onsite visit, during FY18, which will include interviews with parents and staff, classroom visits and review of records.

EDCO and RSM Report Recommendations: November Progress Report

The meeting opened with remarks about the dedication of the teachers and the pride of the parents. Ongoing and planned changes in response to the EDCO and RSM reports were highlighted. Specific issues and questions from the reports were outlined by Ms. Desmarais through this document. Subcommittee discussions and clarifications from the meeting appear in *italics*:

Pages 17-20: Placement and Programming:

- Review of GET (General Education Team) processes and procedures has started with guidance staff at monthly department meetings, with emphasis on implementation and documentation of general education interventions prior to consideration of referral for a special education evaluation. Anticipated completion date for any recommended revisions is June of 2017. *There was some inconsistency from building to building. Barbara Gortych has begun addressing that.*
- At monthly department meetings, teachers from substantially separate programs (Language Based, Connections, Learning Support, and Integrated Support) across levels now meet to review curriculum and entrance and exit criteria. Anticipated completion date for Entrance/Exit guidelines is June, 2017 (**Need for entry/exit criteria for programs also found in RSM report, p. 8**)
- Curriculum review is taking place with the Elementary Special Education Coordinator and the Coordinators of Literacy (K-12) and Math and Science (K-5). Anticipated that recommendations for curriculum will be available in time for consideration in FY18 Budget Planning. *For FY17 we have a federal 240 grant for \$800,000.*
- Curriculum Coordinators for Math and English 6-12 are working with secondary teachers of substantially separate programs to assure that appropriate curriculum materials are available; funds have been made available through 240 grant for materials purchased this year for Science and English in sub-separate classrooms at the high school. Additional recommendations expected in time for FY18 Budget consideration

- ACE Software (Autism Curriculum Encyclopedia – designed and published by the New England Center for Children) was purchased through 240 grant to pilot with 20 students this school year, primarily used in the Connections programs, preschool through high school. Initial 3 hour training took place for staff in October; there are additional training hours already purchased that will allow for ongoing assistance to the teachers as they are implementing this new program. *Software for 20 students is enough to cover our needs at this time.*
- Each school is sending a team of teachers (a general education teacher and a special education teacher) to two days of training on Co-Teaching model of inclusion, and Differentiated Instruction, through the Accept Collaborative (**This is also a recommendation from the RSM report, p. 22, 3D**)
- Consideration of utilizing DESE “Inclusive Ambassador” program; begins with 1 hour visit with District Administrative Team, including all principals – recommendation for January 2017, if available
- Intensive training has been provided to the District’s Evaluation Team Chairs (ETCs) – Bi-weekly meetings with the Special Education Director, Secondary and Elementary Coordinators, and Coordinator of Assessment, Guidance, and Behavioral Health; Job-Alike sessions at monthly Department Meetings; opportunity to participate in Job-Alike round table sessions through EDCO; and enrollment in 3 day institute for ETCs through ACCEPT Collaborative: Nuts and Bolts with Linda Waters (retired Wellesley Special Education Director). (**This training provides clarity of who commits resources, per RSM recommendation, p. 21, 3A**)
- Opportunity rooms: data collection has been more consistent; overall use is under review

Pages 20-23: Staffing

- Evaluation Team Chairs now facilitate all Team meetings, not just Initial and Re-evaluation meetings; through the intensive training as described above, their roles are now more consistent across buildings. It has been clarified that the role of allocation of District funds rests with the ETC. *Currently the busiest team chair at the High School is responsible for 148 students.*
- Consideration of changing ETCs to supervisory role did not take place during the recent contract negotiations. Pro to this model – Administrative oversight of special education services that is full time building based; Con to this model – Substantial increase in funding for Administrative positions. Would likely eliminate the need for the elementary and secondary coordinators. Cost/benefit analysis needed; also would require side agreement with the union
- The Special Education Director and the Coordinator of Assessment, Guidance, and Behavioral Health have established regular meetings and have worked collaboratively on staff supervision and budget allocation, as well as communication amongst staff that provide student support services to students with and without disabilities
- Use of the Academy at cost of \$125,000 is under review. Some IEPs specify this service. Concerns about potential conflicts of interest (example, a behavior specialist at the Cunniff is also employed by the Academy; parents who meet Academy staff at school may request referrals to the Academy). Questions also regarding whether

- counseling services are actually needed for students to access the curriculum. Coordinator of Assessment, Guidance, and Behavioral Health is reviewing counseling services offered and moving towards skill-focused groups, with the behavioral specialists and social workers. *This is not an issue of any particular outside organization; rather, the issue is that no IEP should be written so specifically that any change in equipment or individual named staff member or named outside organization should require the creation of a new IEP. IEPs should specify the services required by the student, not a person who is going to provide them.*
- ELL & Special Education: Ongoing challenge that is not unique to Watertown. DESE has a newly defined position to provide technical assistance to school districts. The first statewide summit for ELL & Special Education Directors will be held on March 15th, 2017, and Watertown will send a Team to this event.
 - Process of dissemination of IEPs is under review. Written guidance anticipated to be available in spring of 2017
 - Conversations have started with staff and administration regarding the use of Instructional Assistants in Watertown. There is a need for ongoing and systemic professional development, beginning with District leadership (principals and curriculum coordinators) regarding the efficacy of utilizing non-licensed staff in the provision of special education services. Role Clarification training is needed for teachers as well as for Instructional Assistants. *This would be a 3-5 year process.*
 - The “Golden Rule for Providing Adult Support” (Causton-Theoharis, Julie N., “The Golden Rule of Providing Support in Inclusive Classrooms: Support Others as You Would Wish to Be Supported”, Teaching Exceptional Children, Vol. 42, No. 2, pp.36-43, 2009) was reviewed by all special education teachers of substantially separate classrooms, inclusion teachers, related service providers, and Instructional Assistants on September 1. General Education teachers, and principals have not yet participated in this activity
 - Several substantially separate classrooms in the District have student to adult ratios of 1:1; this level of support is written directly into students’ IEPs.
 - One principal has already used Instructional Assistant vacancies to hire an additional licensed special education teacher. *Research appears to show that changing our ratio of IAs to professional staff may provide better outcomes for student achievement. This will be part of a larger discussion.*

Pages 23-25: Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process

- As referenced earlier, ETCs are participating in intensive training regarding IEP process and procedure, including the eligibility determination process
- Work on the District Curriculum Accommodation Plan (latest version 2012) review has not yet started; recommendation to form a task force that includes a principal from each level (elementary and secondary), as well as general education teachers from each building (others?) – This work may overlap with revisiting the GET process. Ideally this work will be completed by Spring of 2017, to coincide with CPR Self-Assessment. *The goal is to document in one place what is available to all learners in the District.*
- Focused training on the IEP document has started with ETCs

- Training for special educators to commence in winter, 2017, to focus on writing measurable goals, and curriculum accommodations and modifications
- Service delivery grids are now written only by the ETCs. This change, along with their intensive training, should result in grids that are largely if not entirely free of the errors identified in the report (e.g., names of programs, lack of specificity of staff) by the late fall of 2017; the same is true for the placement page. *A written organizational chart will be developed to show who has responsibility for what.*

Page 25: Professional Learning and Faculty Resources

- Work on the Special Education section of the District website has started; significant improvement is still needed to make this a functional resource for faculty and families. Ideas from parents were gathered at the September SEPAC meeting. Anticipated that website will continue to be built throughout the 2016-2017 school year and summer of 2017
- A Special Education Processes and Procedures written manual is needed. The DCAP from 2012 contains some of the information; however, this should be its own stand-alone document that is available and useful for principals, teachers, and parents. It is the goal that this will be completed prior to the District's Self-Assessment for the Coordinated Program Review, which will be due in the spring of 2017
- Consideration for PD specific to general education teachers and Instructional Assistants regarding role clarification/ use of Instructional Assistants in development of the 274 grant (about \$20,000, due in December).
- DESE has designed two free courses available to principals and to teachers regarding teaching all students, which provide the 15 hours of training in special education required for re-licensure for all teachers and administrators. This information was shared with principals to pass on to their faculty
- Special Education Director developed a course that is a mix of face-to-face and online learning through Moodle in prior district. Materials could be made available for Watertown administrators and teachers, if there is interest. This course is more of the legal framework and processes and procedures, less of the how-to that DESEs course is offering

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 PM.

Submitted by Eileen Hsu-Balzer, Chair