

Minutes from the South Orange/Maplewood Special Education Community January 20th 2015

I. Welcome and Call to Order

Sonya Selig chaired the meeting, and began with announcements and updates.

II. Announcements and Updates

Department of Special Services

- Dr. Barker announced the opening of Montrose School in September and shared fliers regarding registration (attached). This is an inclusive preschool, with full day options.
- Mr. Schmidt gave updates on the PARCC assessment; Teachers will be trained in use of the Google chrome books. Updates (where needed) have been made to students IEP's regarding PARCC assessments. If changes to their children's IEP's are necessary, families should have been informed by their case manager. If parents have not been informed and/or have questions, they should contact their case manager directly.
- 2014-15 is a learning year for everyone, and the State has announced that PARCC assessment results will not be used to make any educational decisions. In essence they 'do not count' for students (though results may impact teacher evaluation.)
- Teachers in inclusion classes have been participating in UDL training, specifically special education and co teachers in inclusion classes. (Note: UDL stand for Universal Design for Learning, for more information, go to <http://udlseries.udlcenter.org/>)

Board of Education

- The Board of Education has three new members, and we have a new Special Education liaison, Maureen Jones, who is also our presenter this evening.
- Ms. Jones introduced herself and spoke of being grateful for the opportunity to work with the BOE and the special education community.

Budget

Mike Donoghue (SEPAC Executive committee member) gave the following updates:

- At the moment, there is no detailed data regarding the budget, we are expecting to see more at the next Board of Education Meeting (originally scheduled for Monday January 28- moved to February 2 due to snow).
- Enrollment is up 1.6%; Out of District placements are up 18%.
- The BOE is negotiating with the teachers union regarding contracts beginning next month.
- Big projects on the horizon are the budget increases for technology spending; the district is considering having a technology expert/support staff in every school.
- Gifted and talented has been budgeted at \$100, 000.
- A District analysis of the Montrose Preschool annual budget anticipates ~ \$300,000 in net benefits (revenues and cost avoidance, not including debt service) in its first year.
- Employee health benefits are also being reviewed; no significant reduction in costs is expected.
- Summer programs are also being reviewed, and the district is considering introducing fees.

School liaison and other updates

- Information was shared about a soccer clinic, events at South Orange Library, and a new program for transitional services for students in grades 7 – 10 for options beyond high school, programs with Union County Vocational School (½ days with Columbia HS),
- Clinton School representatives noted an ongoing concern regarding the consultative model and how it is being evaluated in the inclusion classrooms in grade schools.
- Jefferson school has begun to reinforce the need for alternative activities / sensory integrated options for students at PTA-sponsored events using specific wording on fliers. This has been shared at the Presidents Council and with school liaisons with the goal of having all PTA's being aware and inclusive.
- The question of the istep program was raised, why it is offered at MMS and not SOMS and how should parents decide between the two, sending child to their 'home school' with friends and neighbors or to the school with istep?
- Parents were encouraged to reach out to their school liaisons for Q and A and support; Liaisons were recognized for being present at the meeting and the good work they are doing in district schools. (Names and contact information attached)

III. Presentation: Understanding Central Auditory Processing Disorder. Maureen Jones. MA, CCC-SLP

- The presentation took up most of the rest of the meeting with Q and A regarding individual issues and general concerns. The presentation is available on the SEPAC website (<http://somsepac.org/>)
- Key take-aways: CAP evals should not be given to children before the age of 7/8; The CAP eval is completed by an audiologist and the therapy by a Speech Language Pathologist. It is a scientific battery of tests, every child is different and their needs, accommodations should be different; Parents with concerns were advised to meet with their case manager and speech therapists to review CAP evals and recommendations being used in the classroom.

IV. Communicating with the district

- In conjunction with the district SEPAC has prepared a 'flow chart ' of district employees who provide special services, with contact information (see attached)
- SEPAC is committed to improving communication between the parents and the district, teachers, CST embers, administrators. Parents were encouraged to use the 'chain of command' if they are not hearing back from caseworkers or teachers, or do not believe their child is receiving the appropriate services. We are the biggest advocates for our children and should not be afraid to 'lean in.'

V. Other Discussion

Stephanie Lawson-Muhammad, formerly the Board of Education liaison to the special education community, was present and noted the passing of the baton to Ms. Jones, the new BOE Liaison. The group recognized and thanked Ms. Lawson-Muhammed for attending its meetings, advocating for the special education community on the board and being an active listener. She, in turn, thanked the group for the opportunity to serve and learn more about the unique challenges we face as families of children with special educational needs.

The formal part of the meeting ended at 9.15. Parents was invited to stay and meet with school liaisons or other members of the community present