



## February 5, 2021 SEPAC Monthly Meeting

Attendance - Alison Plante, Allison O'Connor, Angelica Rona, Chis Chanyasukit, Connie Clauson, Gregory Fenton, Ioana Santau, Jane Ellin, Jane Lim, Karen Hong, Laura Greve, Leora Faiber, Lori Preston, Lynn Raymon, Miriam, Ofra Kaplan, Sharon Imber, Shira Horowitz, Tal Kenet, Victoria Carroll, William Putney, Benna Mahoney, Jillian Dymont, Karen Hong, Kate, Kelly Quaye, Miriam Papas, Nancy Nitenson;

SEPAC Executive Committee: Faith Dantowitz - Co-Chair, Linda Monach - Co-Chair  
Lisa Scher - Secretary.

PSB Representatives: Casey Ngo-Miller - Deputy Superintendent of Student Services, Nadene Moll - Special Education Director, Wendy Ryder - Special Education Director, Melissa Devine - Director of Autism and Inclusion Programming, Brenna Mahoney - Special Education Consultant at BHS

School Committee Members; Andy Liu - School Committee SEPAC Liaison, David Pearlman, Vice-Chair

Meeting was held via Zoom from 8:30-9:40 am

Presentation;  
Empowering Students with Reading Disabilities at BHS  
Brenna Mahoney, Special Education Consultant at BHS  
Wendy Ryder, Special Education Director at BHS

Presentation slides;

Meeting proceedings;

Welcome and Updates by Linda Monach, Co-Chair, Brookline SEPAC

Wendy Estrada has agreed to be the SEPAC Representative on the Principal Search Committee for the Runkle School. Members of the Runkle community should feel free to contact Wendy with any input or suggestions they have regarding a successful principal candidate. If you need Wendy's contact information, please email [info@brooklinesepac.org](mailto:info@brooklinesepac.org).

The Superintendent Search Committee will be forwarding their recommendations to the full School Committee at their next scheduled meeting on February 11, 2021. Linda has served as the SEPAC Representative to that group.

School Committee Update by Andy Liu - School Committee Liaison to SEPAC

The only scenario the School Committee is budgeting for is a full in person return to buildings. Dr. Marini is actively planning to return students to buildings in phases throughout the spring. This will start with 1st grade returning on March 1. He has not given dates yet for the other grades which is understandably causing a lot of anxiety. School Committee members have expressed the hope that special needs will be considered as plans are put into place.

The 2021-22 budget is still in its very early stages and there is a lot of uncertainty right now. There is currently a 5 million dollar deficit (which is down from 8 million a few weeks ago). No one expects that to stay as is through this process but we do need to do some planning around it.

We are getting a 1.64 million federal grant from the C.A.R.E.S. Act. Part of that is required to be applied towards student mental health services and supports. Other allowable uses according to the document include early literacy screening, addressing learning loss, and implementing summer and after school programs. This is a very significant windfall to help us address social and emotional needs. Casey will be presenting at School Committee on February 11 about PSB's plans to support mental health for next year.

One idea put forward by the administration is to use some of this money to hire more social workers. Curriculum Subcommittee is meeting on February 23 to draft recommendations for the full School Committee on how to allocate this money. If anyone has ideas on how we could best allocate this money, they should write to Andy and the members of the curriculum subcommittee at the following;

[Andy\\_liu@psbma.org](mailto:Andy_liu@psbma.org)

[Jennifer\\_monopoli@psbma.org](mailto:Jennifer_monopoli@psbma.org)

[Helen\\_charlupski@psbma.org](mailto:Helen_charlupski@psbma.org)

[Susan\\_ditkoff@psbma.org](mailto:Susan_ditkoff@psbma.org)

[barbara\\_scotto@psbma.org](mailto:barbara_scotto@psbma.org)

There is a placeholder in the budget that will increase funds for summer programming from \$150,000 to \$300,000. Some would probably be for compensatory services and some not with the idea being to greatly broaden the population that we would serve. The idea would be to be able to offer summer programming to more kids. The School Committee has identified it as one of their priorities.

REgarding the budget timeline, there will be a legally mandated public hearing at the School Committee meeting on February 11. This will be an opportunity for people to communicate what their priorities are for the budget. We will vote an overall number at the end of the night. We won't get into line items at this point, but the hearing is a good opportunity for anyone who has anything to say to say it. As the budget becomes more clear over the next few months, we will be putting forward more information about categories as well as line items so you will have much more to comment on. There will be many more opportunities to have more substantial conversations about the budget probably in March or early April.

Update from David Pearlman, School Committee Vice Chair

The School Committee has been holding Listening Sessions to give members of the public a chance to interact directly. There are 14 total; 11 for school communities (8 elementary schools, RLA, BHS, and BEEP), 2 scheduled for educators (one for preK - Grade 5 and one for Grades 6-12) and one student listening session for students in grades 7-12.

The SEPAC Co-Chairs both expressed the gratitude they are hearing from SEPAC and community members and stated how impactful the sessions are for the community. They acknowledged how emotionally exhausting, difficult, and draining the sessions must be for School Committee members and expressed their personal appreciation for their work.

No questions were posed from the floor.

## School District Update - Casey Ngo-Miller, Deputy Superintendent of Student Services

I want to present an overview of the direction the district with the support of the School Committee will be going in for the upcoming year. If you haven't already, you will begin to hear a lot about recovery supports. We expect that since children haven't been in school full time we will see some sliding in both academic and social emotional functioning in our students. In addition to the mental health presentation I and a number of my colleagues will join me on February 11, we will be at Curriculum committee on February 23. Michelle Herman from the Office of Teaching and Learning and I have been thinking a lot about what recovery supports will look like. Recovery supports will include supports both academically and social emotionally for students both in general education as well as special education. We are looking at recovery services as a whole and it's very possible some students on IEP's may qualify for services under both general ed and special ed categories.

It would be great if we could begin to offer intervention services before the summer. We just found out what our C.A.R.E.S. Act allocation was late last week so Michelle and I started to go through and pick out what those funds will go towards. We are looking at increasing mental health supports at our schools but we also need some assessment tools so we can better define and identify where our students are currently and where they should be so we know what we can offer.

I'm grateful that the conversation has been very active between the Superintendent, my office, the Office of Teaching and Learning, and the School Committee. It's been really great to see the focus the School Committee has on supporting recovery efforts and increasing social emotional supports at our schools. When you get that support, it's easier for us to be able to support the folks in the schools to do the work. The question now is to figure out how far this funding can take us given we don't have a lot of cushion from the current operating budget to pull from.

Question from David Pearlman - Where are we with assessments for students who were not able to be assessed during the shutdown last year? Is that caught up or can you give us an approximate timeline?

Answer from Nadine Moll, Special Education Director - I am so happy to say we have caught up with that backlog! Done!!! Evaluations are currently taking place as they normally would except in rare cases where for health and safety reasons families are feeling like they can't have their child come in to be assessed in person. In those cases, we're using what we can as a temporary measure.

## Update on COVID Compensatory Services - Melissa Devine, Special Education Director

COVID Compensatory Services are specifically targeted for students on IEP's. For the first half of the year, we were working with families whose students were considered to have high needs. I wish I had the exact number but I can say that over 100 students fell into that category. Some of those students have started receiving COVID Compensatory Services. Mostly in our sub-separate programming we have rolled that phase out. Our next phase is really working on Speech, OT, and Learning Center - more academic based. I'm hoping that the rest of you will start to get letters around that. Those services will be delivered using a grant that we have on weekends and school vacation weeks. We are targeting weekends and April break at this point. February break is just too soon. We have not had a tremendous interest in staff working those hours. Staff are stretched and they are working really hard this year. There has been a big marketing campaign so we have about 15 people interested right now. I'm working really hard to make the groups. We will be working with what staff availability is to determine when we will be offering those groups. The next round of conversations with parents whose students did not fall into the high needs category are beginning to happen now. It helps knowing that now we have two buckets we can draw from; the general ed supports Casey referred to that might be appropriate as well as additional special education. This is all determined by looking at last year when school was shut down and determining if students were able to access curriculum and whether or not they are meeting their IEP goals.

## Additional information from Casey Ngo-Miller

We applied for and received a grant from DESE to offer compensatory services during weekend and school vacations which is really great because it offers the additional funding that we didn't have.

A quick update in the overall special ed budget this year...we saw a higher than average number of requests for hearings and settlement agreements. A settlement conference happens when there is a dispute between the School District and a family. It is an option for resolution where a settlement agreement is drafted but typically that involves a monetary agreement. It's part of my job when these requests come through to determine not only risk but the amount of stress both on staff and the family to go through a hearing process which can be pretty damaging on many different fronts versus a settlement agreement. Both impact our budget pretty greatly. There is a reserve that Special Education receives every year and we are already dipping into that reserve because we are already starting to offer compensatory services and will continue to. We check in with Mary Ellen Norman's Office as the Deputy Superintendent of Finance on a regular basis. As cases come in and we identify what services are required to make students whole again we are constantly trying to identify where funding will come from to meet those needs. I just wanted to give folks that update that it's a bit tighter budget wise in terms of special education funds than usual.

Recovery services are being discussed right now at a high level. That information hasn't been disseminated out to principals and staff yet. For those of you wondering if your child qualifies for recovery services under general education, the schools won't know that information yet.

Question from Laurie Preston - While I think offering services during the summer is amazing, as a parent and a social worker, I see the other side of that and the social emotional impact. My son is looking forward to going to camp for the first time and he's so excited because he wasn't able to go last year, but he is so behind. Now he's on an IEP and if he's chosen for a summer program, now I have to tell him he can't go to camp because he needs to go to a summer program. This is going to be devastating for him. He's going to actually feel punished. So, how is this going to work? What other alternatives are there for children who have social emotional needs that may override their academic needs? And, in a lot of ways, if the camps are going to be there, the kids deserve that break. They deserve that moment to be able to relax.

Response from Casey Ngo-Miller; That's a great question. We know that kids need to be having those typical summer experiences whatever it is they would be doing and we don't want to offer anything that wouldn't allow them to access those opportunities. So, while I don't have an answer to that right now, I can tell you that is absolutely one thing we are considering when we are planning for whatever this program will look like. I appreciate that you brought this up because we have definitely been talking about it. One great thing about our community is that we are big enough to have a lot of resources but also small enough to be able to talk and be super creative. I think that's why Andy is inviting people to let us know if you have a super creative idea, we would be open to it. I'll probably get in trouble for saying this, but we can be thoughtful about prepping kids in August to be ready before the actual school year starts in September.

Question from Miriam - This is for Melissa. For the spring 2020 compensatory services the standard was data based - is that correct? So despite a child missing months of services due to the shutdown in the spring, there needed to be data to support the regression. Is that correct Melissa?

Response from Melissa Devine; Yes, data is one part of that but another part is conversations with the families which is also important. We have to get the data from the family also so it really needs to come from both. But, yes, we did rely on IEP's and goals and how students were and what the data was showing when they came back to school. But there also should be conversations with the family and the data from the family which was really clear from state guidance that we had that also has to be taken into account. And, if there was a decision that parents weren't comfortable with, there are options for resolution for that. We can go to mediation, did you reach out to the special ed director? I want families to know that if you have a conversation with the team and you weren't in

agreement with it, please reach out because we want to resolve those. It's possible those conversations just haven't happened yet for some families because we were charged by the state with reaching out to high needs students first. If you feel no one has contacted you, it may be we just haven't gotten to you yet and those conversations will start happening soon.

Response from Faith Danowitz, SEPAC Co-Chair; My advice to everyone is that if you have concerns you should reach out to your directors. My personal experience and the feedback I've gotten from many, many families has been that they have been incredibly responsive. So, don't be afraid to reach out and don't be afraid to reach out to SEPAC either.

Presentation by Brenna Mahoney and Wendy Ryder - Empowering Students with Reading Disabilities at BHS.

Brenna Mahoney created the LAHB program at BHS in conjunction with our Landmark School consultant. She created it and launched it and was the lead teacher there for the six years she was at BHS. She transitioned into a consultant role and has been working with our high school team on program development for reading and writing services.

Because so much is similar across all programs and all grades, I have included a lot of information from the presentation at the December SEPAC meeting, so any time you see a slide titled "Recap", that is information pulled directly from the December presentation.

If students arrive at BHS still struggling with reading, chances are good they have already been through an intensive intervention program such as Wilson's or OG. Once they arrive in 9th grade, we work very closely with the general and special education teachers to determine what targeted services a student needs.

High School uses Just Words and Mega Words programs to target gaps.

BHS works very hard to empower general education staff to be a part of this process. It's our goal for anyone walking into a co-taught classroom not to be able to tell who is the general educator and who is the special educator. It's the most important feature of a co-taught class. Everyone needs to have common practices and common language and that requires building capacity in our general ed teachers as well as our special ed teachers.

We've worked really hard at BHS to hire dual certified educators which means they have certifications in both content areas and special education. We've shifted our Landmark consultation services to work exclusively with co-taught classrooms. Both consultants go into co-taught classrooms to do coaching and support. We are also bringing department heads and curriculum coordinators along on these coaching visits so they can be involved with curriculum development and support.

We are also explicitly teaching educators to provide instruction on Executive Functioning skills as well (agenda, organizers, planners, etc)

At high school, we need to empower students to take ownership of their reading skills. The most important component to this is the least restrictive environment. If we want to engage students, they need to be able to take classes that interest them and receive the support they need to be successful there.

Social Emotional Resilience Focus is essential at the High School Level. Most 9th graders arrive not aware of their reading needs and not aware of what strategies they need to be successful. Our goal by graduation is to teach them to be strategic in how to monitor and utilize those strategies.

When kids enter high school, they really want to move on from special education and blend in as “normal”. It’s really important this type of instruction be blended into all classes and that all teachers are using a common language when talking about reading skills.

HS students need to be taught to use Assistive Technology as a way to allow them to reach their potential. At BHS, all students have access to Snap and Read and Co Writer.

LAHB (Language and Academic Homebase) program at BHS. For students with a straightforward dyslexia profile who are making slower than expected progress in learning and applying explicitly taught skills. It’s a more restrictive setting in the freshman year and gradually reintegrates as they progress through the grades.

No questions from the floor

Additional information from Melissa Devine, Special Education Director - It’s important for families to realize that not all students who qualify for the LAHB program at BHS come from the LAHB program at Driscoll. Sometimes their needs are being well served at their home schools but when they enter high school, the team determines they need more support. It’s not necessary to have your child transfer to Driscoll in order to access this curriculum at BHS. We also see a lot of students coming back from an out of district placement somewhere like the Carroll School and entering the LAHB program at BHS very successfully.

Questions from the chat;

Carol Seidman; Strategies are fine but if you’re disabled you will likely need accommodations life long. It’s important to teach students what accommodations meet their needs so they can appropriately access the curriculum. For example, if you are blind, you’ll still need visual accommodations.

Response from Faith Danowitz, SEPAC Co-Chair; All true Carol, this is more specifically to LAHB

Response from Linda Monach, SEPAC Co-Chair; But always true that we want to ensure our students know what they need to learn and have self advocacy skills.

Carol Seidman; Yes, and they will still need accommodations. They don’t outgrow their disability.

Response from Faith Danowitz; Self advocacy is key!

Response from Brenna Mahoney; yes, accommodations are key when students are in the general ed setting.

Carol Seidman; If you have a reading disability, you don’t outgrow it. I’m wondering how students who are not in a LAHB program get reading support? As this is siloed first kids with multiple disability

Response from Linda Monach; This was covered at the beginning of the meeting. We will post the slide and the recording. If you still have questions, please reach out to Wendy or Brenna.

Carol Seidman; I did not get notice of this meeting

Vote on approval of December minutes; 3 yes and 1 abstention