

Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: December 11, 2019

Location: Austin ISD, Southfield Building

SEAC MEMBERS ATTENDEES:

Enrique Trejo, Eric Oyler, Lance Kinney, Premal Amin, Heather Merritt, Brian Mangum, Dawnette McKinney, Chad Ouellette, Dr. Akweta Hickman, Maria Hernandez, Lisa Flores, Patricia Carley, Jolene Sanders

GUEST:

John Lees, Ruth Tovar, Norma Castillo, Melody McIntosh, Sandra Salgado, Maria Martinez, Alethia Ostfeld, Ramon Vega, Kim Royal, Rhonda Kunkel, Christina Smith, Marisol Fray, Christina Chen, Jessica Sanchez, Dr. Lisa Goodnow, Dr. Stephanie Hawley, Melissa Minor, and Jennifer Limon

WELCOME AND PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Ms. Tovar is a parent who has never required Special Education services is upset at how the district is handling its students and placements. She is also upset about the number of classes at Govalle. She said we don't trust the district and there is a lack of support for its teachers.

John Lees, a parent, came to showcase the new Coalition of Special Education of Equity committee. They want to partner and engage with SEAC and the AISD Special Education Department. They want to provide input on district policies and procedures and provide community support and input when needed.

NEW SEAC MEMBER WELCOME:

Premal Amin is a new member. He serves on the CAC at an elementary school where his children once attended.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ADDRESS:

Dr. Hickman would like to look at the bylaws in our upcoming meetings. The Public Comment Section is going to move into a more structured approach. We also want to look at adding more members. We would like to get an account for who is on the committee and how long they have served. The district would like to create an archive of past SEAC meetings. The Special Education Administrative Supervisors are present in these meetings to take back what is presented and brainstorm on how they can provide support.

Dr. Hickman invited Dr. Lisa Goodnow to talk about Special Education and Updates:

Dr. Goodnow thanked everyone for coming and for being a part of SEAC, serving our students and offering feedback. She talked about how the district went above and beyond to find the Executive Director of Special Education.

Dr. Goodnow talked about how it is loud and clear that special education needed to have a bigger voice in the original version of School Changes. Highlights of the scenario were a proposal but that it would need to be a strategic direction and decision. The exciting part is the inclusion of deep training for our evaluators.

Dr. Goodnow shared her passion for the National Equity Project. She understands we have just started to scratch the surface and that there is so much more to process. We need to look at how General Education teachers are receiving training in Universal Design for Learning. We have a dream of how this district is going to be the most inclusive. We have to invest in the co-teaching model. The power of two. We have to be mindful of the system and change management. We are committed to addressing special education students. We have to have buy-in at every level of the district. At this time, Lisa Flores recommended that we start at the bottom because meaningful inclusion starts at the bottom level. Dr. Goodnow agreed but said we have to move from both sides, not just from the top or bottom.

A question was raised about how to address everyone. We have to remember that just because they don't report to us doesn't mean that we can't offer training and have conversations have about inclusion. It's a balance. The kids that we service start at the evaluation process. We are having to have disruptive conversations to address changes that need to happen. We are trying to do really important things. We have real-life kids here now. The district is offering training now to our district staff. If the people at the top don't get it won't flow down. We have reached a point that we are no longer looking for people to volunteer. It is now mandatory.

It was briefly shared that a co-teach model includes Special Education and General Education.

MTSS REFERRAL PROCESS:

Melissa Minor showcased the MTSS process. The child study system looks at the whole child every child. Interventions are broken into three tiers, one, two, and three based on the amount of intervention needed by the student. Every Austin ISD campus has a child study team. Child study teams look different based on campus, child, and need. There is usually a Child Study Team chair at campuses that could be the Assistant Principal or the counselor. A district attendee could also provide input at a Child Study Team meeting. The Child Study Team process was shown and reviewed step-by-step. Ms. Minor shared that with the Child Study Team in place progress monitoring happens throughout the entire process.

Questions were asked regarding progress monitoring and what vehicles are used for progress monitoring. Melissa talked about how parents should be notified if students are receiving an intervention. Parents should be notified and involved throughout the entire process. Interventions have to be research-evidence based. Progress monitoring is generally done weekly while frequency is dependent on the intervention that is chosen. The letter includes the intervention, how often they are meeting, and frequency. Campuses are able to make some edits to the letter just not to the actual items required by law. There is a letter that goes out before interventions start.

Important notice: If a parent requests testing is there an opportunity for parents to also submit for evaluation? How does a parent become involved before you inform them? As soon as the need is seen parents are able to request services. Our staff is also able to identify the needs and request services.

Melissa shared that her team is always trying to develop and use brain-based research.

The difference between the Special Education team and the Child Study Team is that the Special Education team is a lot more formal than the Child Study Team team. ARDS have more layers. The Child Study team is a preliminary to Special Education. Their job is to identify deficits with children not identify and diagnose. Referrals to Special Education can be made at any time a disability is suspected. Keep in mind that an evaluation can not take place without parental consent.

Question: How am I going to suspect a disability if I don't know what to look for? The General Education teachers are trained to identify if a student is hitting markers. If a child is not hitting certain markers then the Child Study Team is called in to review and help.

Question: How does the Child Study team help with discipline? The Child Study Team meetings are helpful in creating a plan to help with discipline. They aren't just looking at one score they are looking at the whole picture. Training is provided all year long to support campus staff, however, it is up to principals to make it mandatory for their teams to attend. The district is looking at offering TBRI all the way up through High School.

SPECIAL EDUCATION WEBSITE:

The Austin ISD Special Education website has been updated with the current staff and a resources page.

Dr. Hickman shared that we are looking for feedback from the group on websites and what needs to be published. She reminded the team that whatever we place on the website is what we are endorsing.

DISTRICT EQUITY PLAN:

Dr. Hawley came and would like to host the January or February meeting with the SEAC group. She is requesting the SEAC voice. She wants to talk about what Equity looks like in Special Education.

Question: Do we have an over-representation and an under-representation? It was said that the number of students that were referred, qualified. The department is looking at the materials and tools that were selected and if they could play into over-representation. You may have noticed an abrasion with our evaluation staff that is partially due to the fact that we are asking for more training and a better selection of testing materials. Dr. Hickman is conducting a very serious review of how we evaluate students and making sure they are identified correctly.

Remember that intervention is driven by the evaluation. It was asked if that plays into placements and the answer was, yes. We are looking at identification, evaluation, and discipline. We are disrupting a belief. We are evaluating all areas of disability to ensure that we are being equitable across the district for all of our students.

The committee has been talking about the different levels of the uneven distribution of kids in our district. Enrique Trejo has had a great experience with Special Education. However, he knew that there were differences back when Shapiro was part of the committee. He mentioned that we are heavily relying on centralized placements because families don't know they can advocate for it. Discipline and the need for more training was again addressed. Dr. Hickman shared that she is meeting with district staff to address the on-going need for conversation and best practices.

It was shared that a co-teach model includes Special Education and General Education.

STAFFING:

Norma Castillo presented on behalf of Human Resources. She is a former SPED teacher, and Principal.

Norma reviewed part of what the board approved regarding school changes is a strategic staffing model.

Strategic Staffing for Special Education Includes:

- The student to teacher pipeline
- Hosting a meet and greets
- Sponsoring work visas
- Attending related services townhalls to learn how to recruit staff
- In-district hiring events which include hiring on the spot

A question was asked if we can rehire retired Special Education Teachers. The answer was any retired teacher coming back would need updated training.

Norma reminded the group that there have been times where the applicants aren't a good fit. Our staff are not numbers on paper and that some of our staff do wait to right before the school year begins to leave.

Norma showed a graphic of the AISD Strategic staffing tiers of support.

Dr. Hawley is meeting with Human Resources to develop a professional learning plan. When applying for the district ethnicity is taken off applitrack and not viewable to the hiring manager. However, the Human Resources team is able to pull and share to ensure diversity.

A question was asked how do you know a teacher has violations? It comes through employee relations.

Upcoming Human Resource Incentives could include:

- Increasing the special education stipend

- Proposing an increase to lifeskills, SBS, and scores class stipends

- We are looking at General Ed teachers with a SPED certifications to help incentivize them to go back to SPED.

- Reimbursing teachers who take the Special Education exam.

- We are looking at the ideas of offering test prep.

- Increasing pay for TA's and Paras.

- Teacher assistant to Teacher Pathway with a focus on special education

- Pathways for teachers to transition into related service

- We are making progress and the more we talk about it. We are open to ideas of how we can retain, recruit teachers.

TAKEAWAYS:

- Share a spreadsheet for the parent website page

- Jennifer to send out next meeting invite

- Recommendation page for agenda topics

- Continue to update website

- Send minutes for meetings

- Include interpreter

- Add SEAC meetings to District calendar

CLOSING

This meeting ended at 8:10pm