

**CITY OF NORWALK  
BOARD OF EDUCATION  
SPECIAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
MARCH 29, 2016**

**ATTENDANCE:** Dr. Crevecoeur, Chair; Artie Kassimis, Danyelle Williams,  
Atty. Jeffrey Spahr, Natalie Alonso

**OTHERS:** Dr. Steven Adamowski, Superintendent of Schools; Dr. Michael  
Cicchetti, Interim BOE Chief Operating Officer; John Mosby,  
Sue Haynie, Doug Guyer

**CALL TO ORDER**

Dr. Crevecoeur called the meeting to order at 5:36 p.m. A quorum was present.

**WELCOME/INTRODUCTION**

Dr. Crevecoeur greeted everyone and requested that everyone introduce themselves.

**UPDATE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION IN NORWALK PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**COMMITTEE DISCUSSION ON POSSIBLE ACTION STEPS:**

**• Link between CREC Report and Draft Strategic Operating Plan**

Dr. Adamowski said that this group had been established to provide some oversight for the Special Education program. He then said that there was an outline of 11 points that would be used to guide the group through the next three years. (See attached.)

He said that the current model had been heavily skewed towards outside delivery services. He said that this would require investments in the District to bring the students home. The initial plan had 12 points, but the 12th point was the establishment of funding.

Dr. Adamowski then reviewed the details of the eleven points outlined in the document. He spoke about the fact that there had been a plan to have an E.D. (Emotionally Disturbed) class that had been recommended by CREC a number of years ago. The District had come very close to implementing the plan. He said that the District had a discussion with High Roads to operate the class the first year with two NPS Special Education teachers there who would later take over the class.

Dr. Adamowski said that the IEP will also be undergoing a "desk audit" and the process for IEPs will be revamped.

Dr. Adamowski said that the first five points on the list can be done without major investments.

Dr. Crevecoeur asked where the District stood in terms of the hiring process for the Chief of Specialized Learning and Student Services. Dr. Adamowski said that a new search firm, HYA Associates (Hazard, Young, Attea & Associates) has been chosen to conducting the search for the position and there has already been some results.

Dr. Crevecoeur asked if the overage has been corrected. Dr. Adamowski said that last fall, there had been a number of one-on-one aides and outside placements that had been done without authorization. Dr. Cicchetti said that there was now a paralegal working with the District Financial Officer to handle the various special education contracts. Dr. Adamowski said that last summer, there was a disagreement between the Special Education Department and the Business Office about who would be responsible for preparing the contracts. This issue has now been addressed. Dr. Cicchetti said that it was important to have a good on-going relationship with the service providers.

Atty. Spahr said that there would always be a tension between the parents and the Business Office in terms the students costs. He added that there had been significant delays in terms of mediated agreements. Dr. Adamowski said that he believed that the mediated agreements were being delayed by Counsel due to the volume of the work and the District was making changes in this area to increase the size of the legal department. Dr. Cicchetti said that the District is now having the paralegal look at the invoices as they come in and compare them to the contracts for accountability.

Atty. Spahr noted that Dr. Adamowski had been willing to allow the parents to give input on the search for the Chief of Specialized Learning.

Dr. Adamowski said that there had been some mediated agreements that had not been paid and in the past, there had been some other arrangements where the parent sends the bill to their attorney who then presents the bill to the District attorney for payment. This practice will no longer be allowed.

A question was asked about the E.D. Classes. Dr. Adamowski said that the ultimate goal was to have the students mainstreamed into the general population as their behaviors improve.

A question was asked about High Roads School bringing staff to NHS. Dr. Adamowski said that the model relies on a high level of training. This is why the District needs to have the teaching staff work with the High Roads staff for at least a year.

Ms. Williams said that she was cautious when dealing with E.D. students and would need training from a BCBA. Dr. Adamowski said that initially High Roads will run the class

as they would in their own facility. He added that their training goes beyond what a BCBA could provide.

Dr. Adamowski said that Points 6 through 11 depends on funding. The goal is to develop a full continuum of services in District. The full continuum needs to exist at each level: elementary, middle school and high school, but not necessarily at every school. He said that at the present time, the District has a fuller continuum between the middle schools and the high school, but there needs to be work on the continuum between the elementary schools and the middle schools to achieve consistencies.

Dr. Adamowski then spoke about the need for highly trained staff at Central Office to accomplish all priority recommendations. He said that by the end of the year, he expected to have a full complement of five Special Education teachers.

During the last rounds of NFT negotiations with the District, there was a discussion about having someone who would take the lead in Special Education for all the elementary schools. This staff member would be reviewing all the student IEPs and insures that the programs are consistent. Dr. Adamowski then reviewed how this issue would be handled.

Dr. Adamowski said that the 504 plans were not limited to Special Education issues, but a civil rights issue. There will need to be a technology person who is trained in this area to track these plans. It is critical to have the teachers informed that an incoming student has a 504 plan and to insure that the plans are being followed.

Mr. Kassimis asked if there was software that could be used in this area. Dr. Adamowski said that there was software available but the District was still using paper for these plans at this time.

The final point requires a staff member who can facilitate an outside placement, but can follow up to insure that the student is receiving the services outlined in the IEP. It will also be important to track any increases in the providers' rates. Another aspect is to have the staff connect with the student's family and to inform the families when services are now available in the District.

Dr. Adamowski said that he would want the Committee to be comfortable with the budget and reminded everyone that the Board has to approve the budget each year.

Atty. Spahr asked about the 504 plans. He said that the portability of the information was very important. When his child moved between teachers, they sent a letter along with him so the teachers had a clearer picture of the student and his issues.

Atty. Spahr said that it would be good to let the parents know about the various meetings. He suggested a master list of names for the parents to keep them informed.

Atty. Spahr said that he understood why the District wanted to phase out the paraprofessional, but that they do provide service. Dr. Adamowski said that there were areas where the District needs to change over from paraprofessional to a trained professional. The critical issue is the lack of training for the paraprofessionals. He believed there should be some kind of training for the paras in the student's areas of challenge and then introducing the para to the student they will be working with. This would also mean that there is a higher pay level and a higher job level.

Atty. Spahr said that there were online resources that the paras could use. He added that he appreciated the proposed background basic information for the paras. Dr. Adamowski said that this would be an HR issue also. Dr. Cicchetti said that on March 18th, there was a Professional Development day for the paras that included basic data collection; the difference between enabling and mentoring along with an overview of the various disabilities.

Atty. Spahr said that he had been at a meeting with CREC officials and when they were discussing low cost options, CREC had announced that they would be posting some training modules on line for free.

Dr. Adamowski then spoke about the new early literacy intervention program at Fox Run where there are positions that require greater expertise.

Dr. Crevecoeur said that he had some questions about the early release time for the teacher leadership position. Dr. Adamowski gave a detailed response about the teacher leadership position, which is also referred to as a case manager in some instances. Discussion followed about the details of this type of position. The positions would be posted and would rely on recommendations from the various building principals.

Ms. Williams asked for a timeline for the position. Dr. Adamowski said that there were some positions in the CREC audit that the District does not have and are not funded. There are an additional three positions that are in the structure and have received funding. He pointed out that there were times when the General BOE had increased but the SPED budget had not been increased. This resulted in large spikes for SPED at different times.

Dr. Crevecoeur said there was no one at the head of the Special Education Department at this time. Dr. Adamowski said that middle schools do not have someone as a Special Education teacher/leader and the plan addresses this within the next three years. Dr. Crevecoeur said that rather than rushing through the choice for Special Education Department Head, he would like to see the teacher/leaders identified first and more time taken in choosing the Special Education Director. Dr. Cicchetti said that the CREC had an alternative route for Special Education certification that is a year long class. Those teachers who are already in the classroom can take the class and add more certification to their qualifications. He said that there will be an orientation workshop about this in the

next few days to the teaching staff. Dr. Adamowski said that this would allow the District to recruit in-house.

Dr. Crevecoeur said that many of the parents have difficulty obtaining information from the District. Dr. Adamowski said that there was a great deal of work to do in this area. Dr. Cicchetti said that there were some simple things that can be done immediately, but there needed to be more work in terms of communicating all the good work that the administration has been doing. Discussion followed.

Dr. Crevecoeur said that he had attended the March 18th PD and had seen the teachers working on the various projects. Dr. Cicchetti said that the work was already starting and that every school should have a procedural manual. People don't understand the protocols and the protocols differ from school to school.

Dr. Cicchetti said that there were not enough protocols for testing and that they often did not have enough materials needed for the three different types of tests that the District does. At the last Board meeting, the Board approved the funding for testing materials and they have been ordered and received.

Dr. Adamowski said that the audits are real and that the District is taking them seriously.

Ms. Alonzo asked about the current e-blasts when there is bad weather. She wished to know if Power School could create a list of the IEP or SPED parents. She said that she believed that Power School had the capacity to do this. Dr. Cicchetti said that this was being worked on. He added that there are some presentations that all the parents should have the opportunity to attend.

Atty. Spahr said that when someone comes into the City, there had been a handbook for SPED parents. He suggested that when a new student has their first IEP, they be given a SPED handbook.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Mr. John Mosby said that this meeting was in the newspaper. He said that he had learned a lot. He said that there had been a handbook given to the parents. They haven't been given out in the last few years.

Mr. Mosby objected to the fact that the grandparents and guardians were being ignored. He said that it looks like certain people are allowed to speak about their issues, such as Atty. Spahr. He said that everyone talked without the letting the public speak. The school system has been doing this wrong for a long time.

Ms. Sue Haynie spoke about the case managers and said that it sounded like a good start. She said that when the parent goes to an IEP, the parent is a guest. It would be nice to

see if there could be some kind of ombudsman position where the parent can tell that person that there is a problem with an IEP or another issue. Often this would show trends.

Ms. Haynie said that knowing what skills and qualification the teachers have is important for a parent. Most parents won't asked HR for it because they feel uncomfortable. The information is available but the parents won't ask.

Mr. Doug Guyer, a union representative, came forward and said that Dr. Cicchetti had invited the union to a meeting. There are also a number of good things that are going on in Special Education.

One of the SPED teachers said that a number of her students were Hispanic, so she couldn't just pick up the phone and talk to the family.

Mr. Mosby said that many of the parents are working two jobs, and can't come to the meetings. He said that the minority students will soon make up a majority in the schools and this issue needs to be addressed.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Dr. Crevecoeur adjourned the meeting at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

S. L. Soltes  
Telesco Secretarial Services