

## Long Range Planning Committee Minutes

**September 11, 2017**

Present: Deirdre d'Albertis, Diane Lyons, Laura Schulkind; Tom Burnell, Joe Phelan and Director of Special Education Services Emily Davison.

Members of the LRP met with Emily Davison to review current staffing/organization of Special Education Services in the district and to learn what trends/challenges she expects in the coming years.

How is staff currently deployed?

### **Teachers, Teaching Assistants, Teacher Aides**

Emily works with her assistant to oversee a program with 6 teachers at CLS, 3 teachers at BMS, and 3 teachers at RHS. All are full time. Teaching Assistants supply additional instructional support: 6 at CLS, 3 in BMS (2 of whom cover at least one assignment at the high school), and 1 at RHS. Teacher Aides provide not just direct services to special ed students but also cover general education needs, so it is difficult to tease out FTE data with aides (who are redeployed as needed in a fairly organic manner). In the new CLS contained classroom, for instance, a .5 aide was recently reassigned to support teaching in that environment. In BMS/RHS there is only one dedicate aide for direct services at this time.

### **Related Services: Social Workers, School Psychologists**

In related services, the schools are supported by 1 social worker at CLS and 1 at BMS/RHS. Both share special and general ed responsibilities: Emily noted that the split is maybe 40/60 (predominantly general ed students/families). At one time, the district did not employ its own social workers; rather it contracted services from outside agencies such as CAPE (substance abuse focus) but there was a high rate of turnover and less than satisfactory support of individuals and their families as a result. Currently, staffing is stable and the scope of intervention is much broader. As need has increased for special ed services, our social workers have been able to help meet that need. So too, social workers are supported by federal funding in ways that other positions are not. There is one school psychologist at CLS and 1 shared between BMS/RHS. These professionals primarily administer testing and sit on the committees relating to special ed determinations as well as other groups tasked with overseeing student well-being. Some of their work includes supporting behavior plans and intensive consultation with teachers.

### **Related Services: Speech/Language Pathologists, OT and PT**

There are 2 speech/language pathologists at CLS; both are employed full time and support the whole district. Eligible language disorders can be billed to Medicaid. Each carries a course load of about 22-25 students, providing both mandated and recommended services for 504 students as well as students in a gen ed setting who are eligible for AIS. In CLS there is "push-in" to Kindergarten with phonemic awareness programs, supported this year by a Teaching Assistant. Non-mandated services are often identified through K screening (articulation delay or language concept issues, for example, not severe

enough to warrant CSE referral). The district practices pre-referral intervention as another layer of RTI (Response to Intervention) support. <http://www.rtinetwork.org/learn/what/whatisrti>

Both OT (Occupational Therapy—support to improve a student’s functional ability) and PT (Physical Therapy—support for developing the student’s physical capacities and mobility in the school environment) are contracted service; these have not been provided in-house in anyone’s memory. There are no subs for either OT or PT: the consultant builds in makeup of missed sessions every three weeks first for provider and then for student absences. Since the providers are not scheduled back-to-back as the speech pathologists are, there is more room in the schedule to make up missed sessions. Our PT provider is on site 1.5 days a week. Different districts use different models to provide such services. Some hire an OT assistant and contract for the supervisor, which allows for greater presence and accountability on campus. In her view, although the district limits the amount of pre-referral in these areas, numbers do seem to be increasing for these services. Sensory integration and processing issues are on the rise and teachers often err on the side of asking for support with our youngest students. We discussed ways to support skills, for instance fine motor, in classroom settings without recourse to OT. Is it possible to find one person to support both OT and PT needs? This is well-nigh impossible due to very different training and certification processes.

Additionally, a **Parent Trainer** is made available per SED guidance for parents of autistic students; this is a contracted service perhaps 1 hour a month. The district uses 2 different agencies for this service.

RCSD employs one full time **sign language interpreter** to support a hearing impaired student; we can expect to retain this staff member until the student graduates in several years’ time. This individual functions as an aide when and if the student is away from school and is covered under the ANIE (*ASSOCIATION OF NON-INSTRUCTIONAL EMPLOYEES*) contract (not an instructor per se). So too, we have a contracted teacher of the deaf from BOCES 70% shared with Hyde Park, and a vision therapist who comes from BOCES who comes to CLS for one period a day.

We discussed 1-1 staffing needs in the district and the particular circumstances that make this necessary. District wide, we have 4.5 students being supported with 1-1 instruction.

So too, we discussed cost/benefit of creating support within the district as opposed to relying on BOCES placements: when does the scale tip in favor of employing people in our buildings to work with high needs students as opposed to contracting with BOCES to provide services? Salary and benefits notwithstanding, it may be less expensive to develop in-district programs—particularly when we consider that we receive no money back for BOCES placements. Emily is working closely with Christine Natoli to determine how best to maximize state aid for special education.

**English Language Learners** require special support per state regulation. Currently, we have 1 ELL teacher at CLS and 1 at the MS/HS. Ideally, students place out of ELL in time, but there are some students for whom this will not happen and they require support throughout their school years.

Emily reviewed with us the function of other school services such as the resource room for special ed in our middle and high school. In a resource room setting, 5 students or less receive supplemental, specialized instruction in reading or math, reinforcing IEP (Individual Educational Plan) goals with practice and support. This is a scheduled period for HS students and in place of Study Hall for MS students.

## **Out of District Placements**

There are two levels of out-of-district placement. First, parental placement. We are responsible to testing and delivery of all services, even though the student may be elsewhere (Primrose, for instance). If this placement is local, we can transport the student to our campus for OT or other services. It may be, however, depending on need, that the district must provide services where the student is located. Second, there are BOCES placements. We currently have 3 students in a component program at the middle school level in Red Hook; Emily expects that one student will return to the district in the future. There are several schools we work with for external placements: Abilities First, the Anderson Center, Devereaux, Hillcrest in MA, Cardinal Hays, and the Center for Spectrum Services. We currently have at least one student placed at each of these programs as well as others. The district is responsible for those costs. Emily is examining each case to see when and how it would be appropriate at some time to “pull back” students with such placements to return to the district. How placements impact district finances vary: in some cases we pay part of the tuition. If parents seek their own placement they may assume more of the cost. Referrals ideally should go through the Office of Mental Health in trying to provide the best quality/most fundable placements to support the student’s needs.

## **Home-Bound Students**

A small number of students are “home-bound” for health reasons (recovery from surgery, etc) and the district is also responsible to provide support/services to these individuals.

## **Home Schooled Students**

We do have home schooled students with high needs to whom the district provides special education services.

## **Other Special Needs**

In response to a question about “giftedness” as another category of special education, Emily observed that this classification obtains in some states (PA and FL) but not in New York. The approach in our state is to support accelerated learning through differentiated classroom instruction and enhancement of the curriculum for each individual. Given our small population the establishment of any sort of “gifted and talented” program would create “tracking” by ability grouping. It has been the philosophical approach of the Rhinebeck schools to promote inclusive excellence in our classrooms. Emily went on to say that she has never seen the diversity of cognitive/academic groupings that she finds in the Rhinebeck Schools, which is a tremendous strength and accomplishment of the district.

## **Limits of District’s Responsibility**

We are responsible to provide services to special ed students until the end of the academic year in which they turn 21. What is next for high needs individuals? Often they move from school-age to adult services (Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities): for instance, Anderson does provide both. Public schools articulate special education services within this broader framework of support.

## **Why is the Special Education Population Growing (and by How Much)?**

Where does the RCSD expect to go in terms of support for special ed? How should we expect to see our program evolve? Emily affirms that our schools enjoy an excellent reputation when it comes to special

ed: she has been told that families move to Rhinebeck from Manhattan and California because of that reputation. That being said, special ed needs are rising across the state. This is not just a Rhinebeck scenario. 1 in 4 children will be diagnosed with a mental illness by the time they reach 21. That is a staggering array ranging from anxiety disorders to depression and everything in between. There is a mental health crisis going on in our schools. Families need support. An overabundance of media and exposure to disturbing realities play a role. The schools strive to balance direct support with promoting strategies for pushing through emotional/psychological challenges: what begins as school avoidance, for instance, can develop into full-blown anxiety. We want to give young people tools to cope independently with the environment they must eventually navigate adults. So too, we are better at diagnosing autism and ADHD at a very early age: this gives hope that we can better support and resolve areas of need. There is a high degree of “co-morbidity” between emotional/psychological disturbances and learning disabilities today. The classic high-functioning LD student has been eclipsed to some degree by students with behavioral or emotional overlays to their diagnosis. This requires general education teachers to receive more support, professional development to assist them in their classroom practice. High needs students require more attention and time. Class sizes can and do reflect that reality. The LRP touched on new federal reporting requirements of ESSA: per pupil expenditures by building will be required. Tom wants to begin implementing this data analysis this year (in advance of the requirement).

### **Trends for the Future**

Emily spoke to the integrated co-teaching model of instructional delivery, distinguishing between that and a supplemental approach (MS learning centers and HS resource room). This would represent a shift from support for skills to curriculum support, helping all students keep pace through differentiated instruction. The difference between a consultant teacher approach and use of a teaching assistant to support general education teachers was discussed, as was the co-teaching approach as an alternative to “re-teaching” content a second time over. The team model at BMS is open to co-planning already and may be a good platform for such a shift. Redeployment of existing lines/resources was also touched upon. For the future, she expects to see high needs moving up into the high school; it is crucial to remain as flexible as we are now in meeting those needs.

In closing, members of the committee discussed the manifest success of our special education program: what we are facing in terms of limited resources and increasing need is common to all districts in our area. The LRP asked Emily if she could provide us with a few **key data points as we look to the future:**

--how does our personnel plan compare to similarly sized, “statistical neighbor” districts? Emily noted that in Germantown 10 staff members are employed to support 600 students. In Rhinebeck we employ 10 for a district nearly twice that size. In Pawling, 16 staff members are retained in house.

--how do we demonstrate the level of success of our special ed students (for instance, in contrast to districts that do not provide the range of services seen in Rhinebeck) by the time of school leaving?

### **AGENDA for LRP in coming months:**

The committee will determine benchmarks on 9/25, get an update on the postcard mailing, and develop the to-do lists for standing committees.

As a reminder one of our three board goals for the semester is **Long Range Planning**: The Board will work to understand and address the challenges of declining enrollment and attaining financial stability. In the first-year of this multi-year goal, the Board will engage the school community and the community-at large in providing feedback regarding a preferred and sustainable model of educational programming, while projecting fiscal assumptions and enrollment data over a 3-5 year period in support of the development of the 2018-19 proposed school budget. In year two, the Board will complete the long-range plan, to be updated annually.

Respectfully submitted,

Deirdre d'Albertis