

SNAC



Special Needs Advisory Council

Nantucket, Massachusetts

Laura Steele, Suzanne Fronzuto – Co-Chairs

SNAC Meeting Minutes

December 16, 2020

(Note) The meeting was held by video conference via ZOOM App)

The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:00 PM with 19 people in attendance at the start of the meeting, including several new parents. An opening welcome by co-chair Laura Steele was followed by participant introductions. The minutes of the November 18, 2020 meeting were accepted.

Director Update:

- Deb Gately, Director of Special Services

Since the last update at the November meeting the schools have transitioned back to remote learning. Progress reports are coming out with report cards. Teachers have provided much attention and effort on them using student IEPs as the guiding force. NHS is active on Aspen, with the remaining schools available on 12/22. Translated copies are currently being worked on in the Special Services department and will follow shortly thereafter. Deb has worked this past week on submitting two grants; the first specific to ages 3-5 (“Learning Without Tears”). Materials have been purchased and teachers will be trained, with program implementation planned for after the new year. The second grant is related to COVID-19 compensatory services. The State provides funding for teachers to provide compensatory services for students who do better with in-person learning and may have regressed on skills during the March-June school closure period. Yesterday (12/15) was the deadline for school liaisons to have meetings with highest needs students. Parents of identified students will receive direct contact from Deb with an agreement on what the plan will be and how to arrange for the services. Continuing conversations during annual review meetings throughout the remaining school year will take place to address any regression that has occurred. Future conversations will include the current remote learning session as well. Deb explained that compensatory services can’t overlap with the school day, and some ideas put forth for providing services outside school hours might be during the extended school year period (for students who don’t usually do ESY) or possibly ‘academies’ held during spring break, in addition to sessions scheduled in the afterschool time block in the nearer future for parents wanting that. Deb is currently looking to secure providers to do this.

Deb provided a follow-up to the DESSA (social emotional learning assessment), which has been successfully administered by teachers to all children at NES, NIS and CPS. Professional development time in January will be used to review the results and identify targeted interventions.

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Guest:

- Dr. Elizabeth Hallett – Superintendent, Nantucket Public Schools

Remote Learning: Dr. Hallett provided an update on the return to remote learning. She shared that the school continues to watch the health metrics daily and she continues to keep in regular touch with the Board of Health and Department of Public Health director Roberto Santamaria. The goal is to get things back to in-person learning when staff and students can safely return. Dr. Hallett acknowledged how remote learning can be challenging for some families and commended parents for their role as partners in education for their children. Looking ahead, it cannot be predicted what learning model will be in place on January 4th. Some believe there may be post-holiday surges in the community and across the country. Some districts are considering starting in remote learning on January 4th. Nantucket has not made that determination yet, and though returning in-person on the 4th is the goal, this is tentative and subject to change depending on what leads up to that date. Dr. Hallett noted that the positivity rate is low in the schools compared to the greater community.

Schoology: In response to a question asked by an NES parent about an email she received from the school today, Dr. Hallett provided information on the Schoology learning management system and how it gives parents access to everything in one place. The upper schools are rolling out the program with NES and NIS to follow soon. Parent information sessions and mini trainings are scheduled for this week. Jennifer Rabold, NPS Director of Curriculum & Assessment confirmed that there is a session scheduled for tomorrow and another for January. CPS principal Mike Horton added that when the email with Schoology training and log-in instructions intended only for CPS parents was sent, it was learned that parents in the entire district received the email due to settings on the platform. NES principal Kim Kubisch noted that as the remaining schools roll out, future instruction emails will be coming to parents and until then the email parents recently received can be saved. Parents shared their student's experiences and own impressions on the system, commenting it seemed user friendly. The location of the list of assignments due (or overdue) on the homepage was very helpful. It appeared parents were able to view some but not all content. Jennifer Rabold clarified that some content is not shown via the parent log-in to protect the privacy of other students (students can see each other's postings, where parents can see assignments, grades, etc). There is not a full melding of Schoology and Aspen as of yet.

COVID Positivity Numbers: A parent asked if there was a set number (percentage) of community cases that determines a definite need for remote learning. Dr. Hallett explained vertical versus horizontal spread and noted the Town has not set a fixed threshold to constitute the need to close things down, including the schools. The DPH and NCH can perform contact tracing better without staff and students in school, without having to worry about the possibility of spread in schools. She continues to rely on health metrics and advice from the DPH and NCH when making a determination on remote or in-person learning. The process is challenging and decision making is not done lightly. Right now island numbers are high but contained.

Parent/Staff Q & A:

Attendance: A parent of a younger student experiencing challenges with staying seated and engaged for the entire online learning day inquired how flexible the school is able to be with attendance.

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Parent/Staff Q & A (continued):

Kim Kubisch stressed the most important goal is for kids to enjoy school, which can be hard for the youngest student population where struggles can often occur. She recommends parents who are experiencing these challenges to contact their child's teacher to work out the best plan. Letters to some NES parents will be sent out on the subject of attendance. The communications are fact based and convey to parents the importance of students logging in showing their work. Parents are urged to be in direct contact with their student's teacher regarding any issues or challenges.

Art Classes: A parent asked about any afterschool ideas for her son who is passionate about art and has finished this semester's art class in school.

Mike Horton recommended checking with the Artists Association on the many classes they offer, some taught by NPS teachers. Kim Kubisch explained that during COVID the decision was made to have teachers for music, art, etc. teach only one grade instead of all 400 students in the entire school, which is why art is currently taught every day for one semester per grade. Laura Steele also suggested OutSchool, which has several online art classes at a reasonable cost.

Physical Activity/Movement: With PE not currently in her young child's curriculum, a parent shared there is less physical movement during the school day and asked about any plans or ideas for more of this.

Kim Kubisch shared that movement is planned for and encouraged regularly in in-person learning. There is some of this included in SEL. In the remote model the teacher teaches a 'mini lesson' (10-15 minutes) and then students break out to work independently at which time there is an opportunity to take a movement break. Parents working with their students at home are encouraged to build in these times. Other parents shared their own strategies and suggestions. GoNoodle (dance videos) was suggested as an online resource for 'brain breaks' during remote learning.

Summer School: A parent whose children attended summer school shared that last year's summer school was difficult in the remote model and would like opinions for help when deciding on sending her children for this year's program.

Deb shared she remains hopefully optimistic for in-person ESY and has learned to have Plans A, B and C for options. As time gets closer more will be understood with the current unknowns, including outcomes of vaccine implementation and other shifts that may occur before summer.

Dr. Hallett shared that the vaccine is scheduled to arrive tomorrow for Nantucket's first responders. Teachers are in line earlier for the vaccine as well. With perhaps a larger portion of people being vaccinated by summer more opportunities may be known at that time. The experience gained from last year's program (not held in-person in the school building) more will be known about running of summer school. NPS looks forward to hopefully running 2021 summer school in an in-person model.

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Parent/Staff Q & A (continued):

COVID Testing for Students: With private schools on Nantucket providing tests for their students and staff, what plan does the public schools have?

Dr. Hallett shared that NPS has looked at this. There is the antigen test available. However, after speaking with the four school nurses and school physician Dr. Lepore, she learned that this pool test, which tests a small group of students/staff, will require (should COVID exposure is found) the pool to then take a PCR test. This testing method is okay for surveillance but is not that supported as there is about a 60% security with both false positives and false negatives reported. Some schools are using this tool, but many are not. In regard to other testing, there is the 'Stop the Spread' (asymptomatic testing) offered by NCH which just announced its relocation to the VFW facility. At this time widespread testing for students and staff is currently not something formalized, which is in keeping with other school districts, and, in light of the testing being voluntary, can lead to numbers that are not solid.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:00 PM. All non-parents signed off so the Uncommon Parents support group meeting could begin. The next meeting of the SNAC is January 20, 2021 at 6:00PM. The meeting will again take place via Zoom app.

Respectfully submitted,

Lora Kebbati, Secretary of SNAC

Approved through a vote of SNAC members on _____

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