

SNAC



Special Needs Advisory Council

Nantucket, Massachusetts

Laura Steele, Suzanne Fronzuto – Co-Chairs

SNAC Meeting Minutes

February 17, 2021

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

The meeting was called to order at approximately 6:00 PM with 12 people in attendance at the start of the meeting. An opening welcome by co-chair Laura Steele was followed by participant introductions. The minutes of the January 20, 2020 meeting were accepted.

Guests:

- Kathi Hackett - Program Coordinator and Georgina Sharman – Nantucket Family Support Specialist
Martha's Vineyard Community Services (MVCS)

Kathi and Georgie recently attended a presentation by speaker Patti Menzel, an adult with autism. Patti's presentation, both vibrant and positive, focused on her experiences as an adult with autism and shared from her perspective thoughts and experiences on friendships and relationships and how the current pandemic has helped in some ways to lessen the pressure of face-to-face social interactions. Georgie added that Patti presented a slide show, and with humor and a refreshing perspective shared her thoughts on the way special needs kids may be perceived and how that might feel to them. Kathi wanted to plant the seed with the SNAC and NPS about the possibility of this talented speaker doing a presentation at a meeting, in the schools or the community. Deb Gately said she had received prior to this meeting information also sent to Laura Steele Lora Kebbati from Kathi and will review it. She has been hoping, as part of discussions she's had within her department, to plan a district-wide presentation about the role of their department and its programs, and how special needs students help shape the fabric of the larger school community. Deb will be following up with Kathi sometime after the school break.

Director Update:

- Deb Gately, Director of Special Services

Focus on the IEP in the Special Education Process: The school is required on a yearly basis to talk about the IEP process and what it means. With the understanding that many attending the meeting have a comprehensive understanding of the process, Deb shared a presentation *Special Education IEP & 504 Process* which she designed to look at different aspects and considerations made before student IEP

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eligibility begins. This is a focus of Deb and reflects the work being done by the district right now. Portions of the presentation contain sections of special needs law and looked at parent rights and what that includes, as there appears to have been in the past some inconsistency in the differences in interpretation of some things. It's unclear if post-process parent surveys (questions on how the process went for parents and students, if reports were received and able to be discussed beforehand, if the IEP was received by parents/guardians within a certain amount of time, etc.) were implemented consistently or at all. Deb has been working on the development of the survey, which is a requirement under Massachusetts General Law, and has shared it with the SNAC board before presenting to the larger SNAC membership. The intent is to start the process in September, and Deb will begin enacting it this September. NPS is always needs to look at how things can improve, and the survey helps with this. The survey is not a requirement for parents or guardians to complete, however, surveys do provide additional voice for them and their children who may participate in decision making. Deb is working on finalizing the survey and plans to present it at next month's SNAC meeting for review and feedback. The survey now is in paper form, but an electronic version could be explored. Deb's goal is to put this in place right away.

The IEP referral/qualification process and IEP process in general: For the past year during the pandemic the school has been working under different circumstances, having to adjust timelines and methods for providing services. Deb noted that the information being presented was based on school taking place under normal conditions (in-person learning 5 days per week, etc.) The altered timeframes under COVID conditions have resulted in additional paperwork that parents/guardians are required to sign allowing for time extensions on evaluations, when IEP meetings are being held, etc. The school teams have been working extremely hard to get caught up with this.

Deb would like to expand the presentation for colleagues and friends at the island's private schools as NPS receives referrals from them. The presentation will also be translated and put on the website, and parents are encouraged to reach out with questions, clarifications or feedback at any time.

Deb addressed the questions her office is receiving about the return of signed IEPs to the school. If a signed IEP is not returned by a parent/guardian within 30 days of it being issued, it is sent to the Board of Special Education Appeals as its status is indicated as rejected (due to non-signature) and the parent receives notification from the State. Deb noted that a simple reminder to parents about a non-returned IEP will do the trick, and she has communicated a reminder to staff about follow up with parents to assist.

Parent/Staff Discussion on the presentation included questions about accommodations available to all students without having true modifications or going through the entire IEP process. Deb presented the document that will be included in her presentation, which outlines the extensive list and provided examples of how they are implemented, reiterating that accommodations don't change the instructional level. An

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Director Update (continued):

educator commented she'd recently seen this list, and having for years taught using these supports for students who needed them, had not seen them this codified or presented in such a clear format. She feels this can be very helpful for parents in collaborating with teachers on what might work best for their student. Another parent agreed, noting that a few of the strategies presented might work for her child. Deb pointed out that it's not only the law but makes teaching much easier.

CPS principal Mike Horton shared from the teacher/administrator perspective that good teaching is good teaching and the list represents the tip of the iceberg of what educators do on a regular basis. He cautioned parents on viewing the document as a menu or pick-list and encourages parents towards working together with educators on brainstorming strategies and solutions specific to their individual student. Deb concurred that the list is not to be viewed as a menu, but as options. The information is presented as a knowledge base for parents who may not know about the existence of the document and the options listed, which can be a helpful conversation starter towards parent-teacher collaboration.

Deb shared she has another part of the presentation on 504 plans that she would like to carry over to next month's meeting if possible.

In response to a parent question about private school students being referred for an IEP to the public school. Deb explained the process is for the team chair to talk with the head of the private school or the classroom teacher about what interventions have been made and the supports provided. If the data has been collected and substantiated then the process can be started. Deb has reached out to the heads of school about training on interventions as the State does provide funding to the district to support the private schools for this (known as 'proportionate share'). There is sometimes a misperception that seeking an independent evaluation will always result in an IEP. Deb advised that this is not the case, rather, there is a process for this, and the school will do its own evaluation.

At approximately 7:00 PM the meeting adjourned with 13 people in attendance. The next meeting of the SNAC is March 17, 2021 at 6:00PM. The meeting will again take place via Zoom app.

*****Note: The meeting was subsequently moved to Tuesday, March 30th at 6:00 PM and will include the presentation "Ausome Connections: A Look at Friendships on the Autism Spectrum" by guest speaker Patti Menzel.)**

Respectfully submitted,

Lora Kebbati, Secretary of SNAC

Approved through a vote of SNAC members on _____

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