

PTO Meeting
April 14, 2011

PTO Business (Janice Weinberg, Karen Hartley)

- Krissie Delaney wants items for the Verse by Sunday, 4/17
- Karen mentioned plans for a teacher retirement
- We need a contact person from Peirce to talk with Wallis Raemer about district-level technology initiatives to ensure coordination, especially regarding grants

Special Meeting about the Inclusion Program

(Mark Ryder, Director of Special Education, Arlington Public Schools; Lori Villani, Assistant Director of Special Education, Elementary Level; Karen Hartley, Peirce Principal)

General overview of SPED structure and developments (Mark Ryder)

- There are some changes for next year.
- Mark is leaving the position. Changes with administrative structure may occur. Next year there will be some kind of interim structure to allow a thoughtful approach/search.
- Budget passed by school committee kept SPED funding the same in the face of a lot of cuts. There could still be some changes/adjustments based on needs.
- Structure overview:
 - o Background: Arlington has invested in bringing back into district close to half the kids who were going out for SPED.
 - o Arlington has developed Supported Learning Centers (SLCs) A,B, and C. These are intensive programs for children on the autism spectrum, children with social/emotional behavior issues, and children with cognitive special needs.
 - o In addition, at Peirce there is the inclusion program for children with language-based learning difficulties.
 - o At elementary schools, A is at Stratton, B is at Dallin, and C is at Brackett.
 - o Each school has learning specialists (many elementary schools call them liaisons) who support kids getting any inclusion-level services. Each school has a team chair who reports to Lori.
 - o There are also related service providers, for example occupational and physical therapy, social workers.
 - o Kindergarten level has had a “transitional classroom” at Stratton for the past few years
- Next year will include
 - o expansion in preschool SPED
 - o adding another psychologist
 - o changes at other schools: SLC-C strand at Brackett will go from 1 to 2 classrooms, SLC-A will gain another classroom at High School
 - o at Peirce:

- At kindergarten level have decided to expand SLCs so now Peirce will have a SLC-A classroom (a class with 5 students that is completely self-contained, vs. part of inclusion model). It will still be connected with the expertise at Stratton. The move here is in response to Thompson potentially closing.
- Peirce will also have an inclusion classroom at the kindergarten level, with Ann LeBlanc (former teacher at the transitional kindergarten) coming to be the kindergarten special education teacher. There will no longer be a transitional kindergarten at Stratton.
- Arlington Special Ed Department is committed to continuing the inclusion program. District leadership feels very positive about it after the first year. Will continue investing in the program and making sure it's working for the students here.

Description of inclusion program support (Lori Villani)

- Last January the district began thinking about the inclusion model. They reached out to Haggerty School which has been co-taught since 1997, led by Principal Joe Petner.
- Staff who knew they would participate went to observe and meet with staff at the Haggerty School.
- Over the summer had 4 days of collaborative planning time for the “marriages” (co-teaching)
- Teachers asked what co-teaching is supposed to look like – dept said there is no prescription. Want someone to be able to come in and not be able to tell who is GenEd and who is SPED teacher or student, to see a cohesive approach to teaching everyone
- Discussed the approaches and gave teachers core planning time
- When school started got DSAC (District School Assistance Center from State Dept of Education) grant on administrative leadership that has allowed 2 things
 - brought in Joe Petner to observe partnerships and describe strengths and areas to build on.
 - Lori, Mark and Karen went to state-level training with focus on co-teaching and emphasis on how to maximize resources in GenEd classroom
- A week ago, Joe Petner came to talk about universal design for learning – how to meet needs of different learners within a lesson plan
- Have also been fortunate through connection with Joe to get access to state-level online training (free professional development) that is hard to get into. Two teachers participated in online training and more will participate this summer.
- Entire district moved to Collaborative Learning Teams (CLT)– allows time in professional development for groups of educators to come together and focus on a project. Peirce focused their CLT around this program and how to look at data and expand student growth.
- Looking forward, hope this summer to get into some Landmark School trainings -- math and/or language-based learning programs

- Also going to be looking into the work of Marilyn Friend who focuses on co-teaching philosophy and how to align it with universal design – will be getting her videos and books. Other districts are also starting to invest in her work.

Summary of Parent Q&A/Discussion

- **Praise for the program:** Two parents and Principal Hartley spoke about the successes of the program.
- **Funds for teacher training:** Parents asked about funds available for professional development for teachers, and learned that there is grant funding. This year training will include some Landmark Training, and investment in videos and other materials by Marilyn Friend (see above). Teachers will have five days over the summer to meet and plan collaboratively.
- **Evaluating the program - students:** Parents asked how the program will be evaluated for students and learned that it will be through
 - o MCAS scores, which will be analyzed with assistance from the District School Assistance Center of the State Department of Education.
 - o Overall student achievement, qualitative and quantitative, including district-wide reading, writing and math assessments for SPED and GenEd. These assessments are uniform across town. Will look at patterns of previous growth vs. this year's growth.
 - o Parents asked whether these results will be shared (along the model of past parent nights to talk about MCAS scores) and there may be a meeting scheduled at Peirce in Fall 2011 for this purpose, after the department of SPED has shared the results with the School Committee.
- **Evaluating the program - teachers:** Parents asked how teachers can give feedback, ask for support, or give wish lists, and learned that teachers can talk with or email Karen or Lori, there are funds available, and there is Collaborative Learning Team (CLT) time when teachers involved in inclusion collaborate and evaluate.
- **Evaluating the program- parents:** Parents asked whether parents will be surveyed and learned that the CLT is going to send out a survey to parents of kids in GenED and SPED, to ask what they think of the program and how their kids are doing. There was a suggestion that if CLT survey results (see below) cannot be shared there be a forum after the survey comes out where the teachers can speak.
- **Parent awareness:** Parents asked how they can get information on the program and learned they can ask the classroom teacher or volunteer during “missing gym.”
- **Mandates on inclusion:** Parents asked whether there are mandates for inclusion classrooms such as maximum class size, need for a full-time aide. They learned that the only mandate is ratio not to exceed 40/60 in terms of students in SPED/GenED. They learned that the department is committed to a full-time aide.
 - o Parents asked why there is no aide currently in the 2nd grade inclusion classroom, and Principal Hartley said that for the rest of this year they would not have this. The reason is that we learned over the course of the year that we needed a teacher in the Learning Center to support SPED teachers throughout

the school and the increasing number of students on IEPs in both classrooms. As a result, Ms. Smith was moved from the 2nd grade classroom to the Learning Center position.

- There will be budget for a 2nd grade aide again next year.
- **Learning Center:** Parents asked for a description of the Learning center and learned that it exists to serve any student in any grade on an IEP. Peirce has 20 students who are SPED but aren't in the inclusion program – that is the caseload for MS Smith.
- **How kids are identified for Kindergarten SPED:** Parents asked how kids are identified for Kindergarten and learned that the kids are coming from the town's SPED preschools.
- **Training for parents/kids:** Parents asked whether there will be any type of programming/curriculum to teach tolerance and help parents talk with their kids about the inclusion model. This is a possibility.
- **Classroom assignments:**
 - Parents asked whether kids in GenEd are targeted to the regular or inclusion classroom, and learned that this is not the case.
 - Parents asked if they could request one classroom or another and learned that requests would be considered, in the context of considering many other factors that go into classroom placement.
- **Aides:** Parents asked what educational background does an aide have, and learned that it can vary but in our district an aide is often a certified teacher.
- **Number of students in SPED at Peirce:**
 - Lori Villani noted that there is not high percentage of kids in SPED at Peirce: the percentage of kids in SPED is currently 19%, while the percent projected next year is 15%. State average 17%. Arlington is at 18.5% district-wide.
 - Parents asked how many more children would come to Peirce in the inclusion program this fall and learned that it was unlikely to go over the currently projected 15%. Will never go over 8-9 students in a classroom.
- **IEPs:** Parents asked who writes IEPs and learned that in inclusion programs SPED teachers do it with related service providers and GenEd teacher. For noninclusion classrooms it's the liaison (June Smith is liaison @ Peirce) with the GenEd teacher and related service providers.
- **Training for GenEd teachers:** Parents asked whether there will be additional training for GenEd teachers and learned that they have been going to training jointly.
- **Differentiation/shared resources within a grad level:**
 - Parents asked whether students in the two classrooms are ever combined in ability groups as described last year and learned that it varies; some grade levels are doing it more and some less. Parents asked for more details and learned there isn't much common planning time but next year there should be more teaching assistants to cover specials and allow more common planning time. (Due to the cut in gym, teachers did not always have common planning time this year.)
 - Parents asked more about how kids could be working at their ability and be challenged, and learned that differentiation has been a theme in Arlington for

a long time. Teachers here do a great job given what we have for resources here and the large classrooms size. There is differentiation in reading because of the assessments. The reality is that in large GenEd classrooms, running multiple groups in reading, math, science or social studies is hard. The ideal is hard to achieve, and Joe Petner advised that the inclusion model must grow through small steps each year. At same time, Lori said she heard that this was a priority for parents at the meeting.

- Parents asked whether the aide can be shared between classrooms and learned that the aide is really needed in the inclusion room.
- **Student achievement/GenEd:** Parents asked whether there is data to show whether at other schools kids in GenEd tend to succeed academically at the same or better level, and learned there is research available, and there may be data available from the Haggerty School.
- **Teacher performance:** Karen noted that the teachers at Peirce have done a phenomenal job since they are already underpaid they have done so much with so little. She noted that Joe Petner was very impressed that teachers have stepped up and stayed positive with flexibility open mindedness and effort.
- **Future training:** Parents asked whether there are any particular resources that the department wants to have in place for next year and learned that the CLT has been looking at this. The district is also making technology recommendations.
- **Conflict resolution:** Parents asked how any lack of cooperation among co-teachers would be handled and learned that teachers were told they did not have to continue after this year if it didn't work, and the department is asking individuals if they feel successful and wish to continue. They learned that co-teaching is more challenging in secondary school and Arlington may stay with a model that is “substantially separate” after elementary.
- **Number of kindergarten classes:** Parents asked if there might be a third Kindergarten class and learned that enrollment at the moment points to just two.
- **Parents support:** Parents asked what they can do to support the program and learned that they can continue to reach out to leaders in SPED and fill out their surveys.
- **Timing of announcing teacher placement:** Parents asked when they would know teacher placements and Karen said this was uncertain with the unknowns such as state aid and the override.
- **Vision:** Parents asked what if there were an infusion of funds – what would be the dreams. Karen said hers would be to open a third grade level once numbers go over 22. She would fight for this in better times.
- **Contact for more info:** Lori Villani provided lvillani@arlington.k12.us.ma. She noted she will be happy to get back to parents but may not be able to respond immediately as she works in 8 buildings.