

Warwick Special Education Advisory Committee
February 13, 2008

Attendance: Kara Theriault, Dorrie Carter, Delia McDermott, MacKenzie Medwin, Maggie Scapellati, Eileen Meyer, Melanie Cluley, Jennifer DiTusa, Kristen Batchelor, Jennifer Rosella, Jenna Conlon, Katlyn LaCroix, Cindy Roberts, Paul Cannistra, Carla Jaggi, Jessica Schad, Richard D'Agostino, Susan Rooney, and Derek Thayer.

Meeting was called to order at 7:03pm by Jessica Schad. Jessica made a motion to accept the last meeting minutes. Delia McDermott accepted and Melanie Cluley seconded the motion.

Jessica began the meeting by discussing the next transition workshop which is on February 19th. She then gave the committee an update on WSEAC sponsored events. The most recent event which was co-sponsored by RIPIN had 25 people signed up of which 16 attended – which is very positive. Jessica then mentioned that Dorrie Carter had mentioned an idea for another WSEAC event. Her suggestion was to bring in an attorney to discuss special need trusts. It was mentioned that attorney, Nancy Chudacoff has done a good job in the past presenting on this topic and Dr. D'Agostino also mentioned that the attorney currently working with the Warwick School Department might also be a good choice. This workshop would be tentatively scheduled for April.

Jessica then began discussing the New Students Workshop which is tentatively scheduled for May 6th or May 7th at the Admin Building. Dr. D'Agostino let the committee know that Sheila will be out for a month, and he acknowledged that it has been a challenge working without her. As far as scheduling goes, Dr. D'Agostino let us know that while Sheila is out, that he would need to be contacted directly. Jessica asked if anyone had a chance to ask any professionals at their schools to volunteer at the New Students workshop – but no one responded. Paul Cannistra indicated that the members of the School Committee would like to be notified of the date of the workshop so that they can be represented.

New Business: Jessica asked Dr. D'Agostino if the WSEAC events could be posted on the Warwick Public Schools website. Dr. D'Agostino said that if we could give him the details about the events, then he would be able to get them posted.

Director of Special Education Report: Dr. D'Agostino discussed how the state monitoring was completed as of 1/25/08 and that they are currently in the process of addressing the items which were highlighted as concerns in the report. Dr. D'Agostino identified the following items: RTI (Response To Intervention) implementation, OHI (Other Health Impairment) and how Warwick has the highest number in the state which is currently 2 times the national average, Special Education Bussing – about how students are spending too much time on the bus and are not arriving on time, Adjustment rooms, recordkeeping issues, and vocational assessment.

Dr. D'Agostino then addressed the issue of the report card and the proposed modification. The modification is to add another point to the rubric scale to make it 5 points. The proposed rubric would be as follows:

5-Exceeds grade level expectations

4-Meets grade level expectations

3-Below grade level expectations, but making progress (this is the new proposal)

2-Below grade level expectations

1-Significantly below grade level expectations

The next step in this process is for Dr. Horoschak to put it into the package to go to the next School Committee meeting.

The next item that Dr. D'Agostino discussed is that the regents adopted new mandates. They will be meeting with the Commissioner to discuss these mandates. He covered the following with the committee:

1. Caseloads – no caps – What this means for Warwick is greater flexibility to increase only if the need arises. It does not mean that the number will rise.
2. Speech and Language – As of 7/1/08, it no longer stands alone. It is not covered under IDEA. It will be transferring from Special Education to General Education.
3. DD label will be moved from age 6 to age 8.

Many committee members had specific questions for Dr. D'Agostino on these mandates. Dr. D'Agostino indicated that he also was looking for further clarification and would address the questions with the Commissioner.

COTA services at Rhodes – Dr. D'Agostino let the committee know that they have had a difficult time getting someone to fill in. Dr. D'Agostino prepared a letter explaining the circumstances and that the services will be made up later or during the summer. COTA services are Medicaid reimburseable.

Redistricting – Dr. D'Agostino made the committee aware of the process – that the Supt. has made assignments and that the minutes are posted on the website. He indicated that a sub-committee examined the feeder schools into Winman Jr. High and that they didn't have the capacity to move the 6th graders and that renting trailers would be both cost prohibitive as well as not having enough land to sustain them. That took this option off the table. The next step was to examine size and capacity. Currently Potowomut is at 40% of building capacity. Drum Rock is currently running at 90% capacity which is ideal. Cedar Hill currently has two available rooms and Drum Rock has 1. When closing Wickes was examined, it showed that it would be difficult to fit the kids into the remaining Winman feeder schools. Also, it was difficult to see the effect of the airport expansion. At the last meeting which was held, the City Planner indicated that there has been a 1% loss of population each year over the last 20 years. There used to be 27 elementary schools, now there are 20 and that the last time redistricting was considered was 12-15 years ago.

Dr. D'Agostino indicated that taxpayer input would be after the recommendations are given to the Joint Committee and the School Committee.

School Committee update: Paul Cannistra discussed the current financial implications facing the School Committee. Teacher retro pay is an issue as well as reduced funding. He indicated the need to look over the horizon and take a business view on efficiency. He stated that we can't keep dipping into the well or in other words, keep

raising the taxes. As a School Committee, they represent the three constituencies, the students, the teachers and administrators, as well as the taxpayers. The City is currently facing a 6-8 million dollar deficit. It is imperative to be fiscally responsible. The estimate of cost savings of closing 3 elementary schools is \$2.5 million dollars per year. There would still be a significant shortfall.

Jessica asked about the reasoning of the 3pm time for the redistricting committee meetings. It is an inconvenient time for parents to attend. Dr. D'Agostino indicated that the time was not supposed to be of convenience to the parents for these meetings, but instead be convenient for the teachers and administrators who are working members of the team. Specific public hearings will be held after the recommendations have been presented and these will be at a convenient time so that parents can attend and be heard.

Kara asked Dr. D'Agostino what the effect would be on closing inclusion schools since some of the schools where these children would then go to are self contained models. He indicated that with these shifts that they would be able to re-configure the schools to move from self contained only to inclusion models as well.

State Update: Sharon Terzian was absent.

Membership – Jessica is holding a few applications and is waiting for those individuals to attend one of our meetings to see if they are interested in becoming members.

Next Meeting Date: March 12, 2008 at 7:00pm. Jessica asked the committee to re-schedule the April meeting due to the Co-Chair's participation in Autism Awareness Day at the State House. Possible new date would be the 23rd of April at 7:00pm.

Public Comment: Delia asked what would happen to the vacant buildings left behind if any elementary schools were to close. Paul Cannistra indicated that they were looking into the cost of "mothballing" the buildings which would give them the flexibility to re-open them if the need were there. To lease the buildings would be a burden both from a cost perspective as well as from a security perspective, but nothing has been decided.

Kristen Batchelor asked about opening a Pre-K program at Holliman due to the distance that she currently has to travel to get across town to Cedar Hill. Dr. D'Agostino discussed that they are trying to strategically place 3 Pre-K programs in Warwick to address this issue.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:52pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Kara Theriault