

SEPAG Minutes

4/20/23

Committee Members present:

Kelly Martins
Danit Schwartz
Jannie Chung
Yael Shafir
Juana Reyes

Administration Present:

Floro Villanueva
Patricia Eichenlaub

Kelly Martins Introduced Ms. Eichenlaub – Today's Presenter

Mrs. Eichenlaub presented slides on services available and who provides them.

The district is looking for a new school psychologist to replace Ms. Perkins who resigned at the last board meeting due to a family emergency.

Additional Notes on slides:

School Psychologist and School Social Worker – Can be case managers

Learning Disabilities Teacher Consultants (assess, evaluate, review testing, generate ideas for students, support teachers, source of support for students (social emotional support)

Hillside: Eileen Kennedy (Resource, ESL)

Tenakill: Laurie Rochlin (Resource)

Speech Language Therapist

Hillside: Leanne Schettino and Gila Rachlin (Preschool – K) and part time (Carly – shared with demarest – 1st and 2nd grade)

Tenakill: Kathy Hedenberg

Behaviorist: support challenging behaviors, help students succeed at school, in and out of classes

Hillside: full time behaviorist – Liz Apollo – experience with ASD, challenging behaviors

Tenakill: 3 days a week behaviorist – Kelly Cassetta – Region 3 Program

Occupational Therapist – self help skills, adaptive skills, functional or mobility skills, classroom support, sensory concerns, social skills

OT: Nancy Saccocio – Tenakill and Hillside

Two Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants – COTA – work under the supervision of OT, Tools with Travis – other groups

Travis Jackson

The other was on leave but has resigned April 2023

Multisensory Reading Specialist – ORTON trained master's degree level provider – works on decoding, phonics, word patterns, work with children with difficulties with reading, writing and spelling

Some PLUS teachers are also ORTON Gillingham trained

Lori Scalera – Hillside

Andrea Watkins – Tenakill

Physical Therapist – helps students with gross motor needs, walking, gait, jumping, running etc.

Dr. Brittany Steindl

School Counselors – work with students on academic, social emotional, work with single children and groups, standardized testing coordination, formulate curriculum lessons, work with staff, wellness Wed.

Hillside: Dara Weiss and Suzanne Lang

Tenakill: Alexandra Earle and Kate Weisenseel – also work on helping students acclimate to middle school

Programs:

Hillside Programs

Self Contained Pre-K – students who need smaller, intimate setting for learning and growth and development – Allison Wong

Two Integrated Pre-K classes – split between typical peers and special education peers

Collaborative K – Teacher and Special Ed Teacher for a good portion of the day

Modified Collaborative Classes – Two teachers

Replacement Classes – follow curriculum but at less depth, same pace

Small Group Learning Communities (SGLC/LLD) – smaller

SELF Class – social emotional learning needs

Tenakill Programs

Collaborative Classes LA and Math, Science and Social Studies

Replacement Classes

SGLC/LLD – fragile learners, small group community

Programs can change as the needs of students change.

PLEASE SEE SLIDES FOR COMPLETE INFORMATION

AS A REMINDER: PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE PROVIDED AT SCHOOL IS MEANT TO ADDRESS ISSUES IMPACTING LEARNING AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION – IT IS NOT A REPLACEMENT FOR PRIVATE PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT, IF NEEDED BY STUDENT

Q&A:

Parent Question: Where do autistic kids fit (what setting)?

A: Varies depending on the needs of the student – some in general ed, some replacement, some in collaborative classes, in and out of district placements. One program does not fit all children.

Parent Question: What is the difference between a 504 and IEP?

A: Both are legal documents. IEP – needs modifications to the curriculum, they need services, goals, 504 – part of American with Disabilities Act – purpose is to level playing field to make education accessible for all children. 504 is meant to accommodate but not modify. IEPs modify the curriculum.

Parent Question: What can you tell me about the difference between school counselors, social workers, and school psychologists and how they work with social emotional needs?

A: This depends on the needs of the child. Therapy can be provided by all three but tool boxes available to each may differ.

Question: How can we find out the qualifications of the service providers?

A: You can discuss this with the provider, ask questions, discuss goals and how they will help the child. Continuous conversations are encouraged starting at IEP Meeting. Follow up with providers to ask questions about what tools are being used and how they are helping your child.

Parent Question: Can a parent request someone to work with a child on social emotional needs?

A: You can talk with case manager to discuss what services or changes are needed to best help children. Work will focus on issues as they relate to school and access to learning and education. If your child needs care beyond that it is encouraged that you also supplement with private psychological care.

Parent Question: What is the general approach used in school?

A: The school works towards a more collaborative model – hope to have it in every grade.

This can include: Modified Classrooms, Language arts, math, science/social studies on a rotation.

Parent Question: Are School psychologists providing clinical interventions?

A: At hillside they are not, but at Tenakill they do counsel students, as appropriate.

Parent Question: The population of Special ed and IEP is growing – how will this work with the space we have?

A: Speech therapy rooms are smaller rooms. The district plans to add modular spaces in the courtyard at Hillside (2024-2025 school year) said Floro to allow for additional space. Multigrade classes now based on needs of students – SELF started off single grade – now multigrade. LDD groups (K-2, 3, 4) – multigrade. The district adjusts as the needs of the community shift.

Parent Question: Is the curriculum modified in the SELF Classroom?

A: All children in the SELF classroom right now are at and above grade level now – the curriculum is not modified and children are challenged in areas they need. SELF is considered reverse inclusion.

Parent Comment: There are a few providers that were missed in the slides.

A: West Bergen Mental Health provides Emily Kline – Social emotional needs – mostly hillside but 1.5 days at Tenakill and completes clearance evaluations.

Mrs. Wiseman – social worker but provides support for social skills – works in concert with behaviorists to build social skills

Parent Question: When it comes to school counselor do they work with the entire school? What's the participation with the school counselor. Do students attend school counselor? How are they contacting students?

A: School counselors are out and about in the building, address teacher referrals, provide ICARE, meeting with students, providing Abuse and Prevention Program and CAP. They have knowledge of all students and sit on committees where teachers and panel of experts get together to answer questions. Committee in both buildings meet with counselors to address students in special education and to discuss students of concern. As parents, please support children by helping them develop advocacy skills, say what you're feeling. If you have a concern, reach out to counselors with concerns about your children and they can check in with them.

If your child is in:

General Ed: reach out to counselors

Special Ed: reach out to case manager first – they will disseminate information to who needs it

Parent Question: Can you tell us more about transition from Tenakill to HS?

A: 8th grade year is filled with transition prep - Laurie Rockland and Mrs. Eichenlaub – transitions all 8th grade students – information gathering from HS, meeting in Jan with HS to go over special education and 504 students to discuss what students need, talk about strengths and weaknesses, how best to support children, what has been helpful, talks and presentations to students, parents receive emails requesting information, check in with parents.

Parent Suggestion: Next year: maybe have someone talk to ALL 8th grade students – not just special education cohort.

Parent Question: How do you as a 8th grade parent know what HS offers?

A: Meeting for parents, what they have to offer, how the school works, counselors meet with parents individually too, Carrie Nick – HS – member of team, she will work with Tenakill counselors to meet with parents. Try to avoid changing schedule due to misplacement – prefer to make best placement before HS starts. Teachers make recommendations.

Parent Comment: How to best support students during transitions?

Last SEPAG meeting we discussed how to help students with transition to HS:

Work with students on self advocacy skills - needed for transitions

6th grade and on students can attend IEP meetings. Let parents know this is possible. Child insight into what they need.

Parent Question: In the future is there a plan to open SELG classrooms in HS – Demarest?

No – only available in Old Tappan – acknowledge this is hard for students, friends. Bridge Program – Demarest – children with social emotional needs – average or above average academics, anxiety, therapeutic program, smaller classes, support, smaller groups

Old Tappan – STEP Program – SGLC Program – 5 or 6 steps – based on child's needs – lessons are modified depending on the step – work differentiated for abilities, self contained.

Parent Question: What is the difference between small group learning community and SELF?

Self Contained PreL 3-5, smaller group, more nurturing place to develop

SGLC – most academics in one room, start day in gen ed group and then SELF where they spend the day except for specials.

SELF – self contained, reverse inclusion, start with Ms. DiQuattro and as able to will spend more and more time in general ed – goal is to get kids back to general ed, specials with gen ed class and snack if child is able to, attend recess with general ed

All Special Educations Classrooms are tied to General Education Classroom – Meaning if your child is in a special education classroom they are linked to a general education classroom and will be a part of activities, experiences, recess, snack etc. as possible.

Parent Question: Are parents of 6, 7, 8th graders aware that they are invited to attend IEP Meetings?

A: Mrs. Eichenlaub said she thinks so but will make sure. Many children will decline the offer but it is available.

Parent Concern: parents don't always get the message through students. Can we ask case managers to share this information with parents?

A: Yes

Meeting was concluded and **next meeting was announced: MAY 15th at 7 PM in the Tenakill Middle School Library** – please invite other parents and caregivers. Meeting is open to the community.

Reminded parents of SEPAG website: <https://www.closterschools.org/SEPAG>

If you would like to be added to the email list please send an email to DrRenataMartins@gmail.com