

## Board Special Meeting

### **Oversight Work Session: Special Education; Executive Session: To Evaluate the Performance of a Public Employee**

March 20, 2019

Auditorium & Board Conference Room, John Stanford Center

2445 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave S, Seattle, WA 98134

### **Minutes**

**Call to order:** Director Harris called the work session to order. Directors Harris, Burke, DeWolf, Geary, Mack, and Patu were in attendance. Director Pinkham arrived at 4:43.

Staff in attendance were Superintendent Juneau, Wyeth Jessee, Chief of Student Support Services, Trish Campbell, Director of Special Education, Nicole Fitch, Director of Special Education School-Based Services, and Beth Mills, Director of Special Education Operations.

Director Geary called the oversight work session order at 4:30pm.

### **Oversight Work Session: Special Education**

Mr. Jessee started off the presentation. He introduced himself and the three Special Education Directors, Trish Campbell, Nicole Fitch, and Beth Mills. Mr. Jessee gave an overview of the presentation and about themes – that many of them have stayed the same, such as high-quality services and unconditional commitment to all students. He also mentioned the concern around the money that it costs for special education. We need to better balance our services so that we will not have to cut services that are more preventative or less restrictive.

Mr. Jessee reviewed the vision and mission statements that were developed during the time when the Special Education department was working with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) in the Comprehensive Corrective Action Plan (C-CAP). He talked about going on school visits and seeing that there is room for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to have a seat in the general education class and have engagement with their peers.

The next slides were about department functions and compliance. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and OSPI visited last week to meet with the special education department and review their processes and procedures. OSEP and OSPI were impressed with the systems work that we are doing for the district.

The next slides were around the departmental strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, and the directors each talked about the areas that they were responsible for in the SWOT.

- Ms. Campbell addressed hiring teachers - partnering with Human Resources around recruiting, the classified to certificated program, and the success around recruiting high-quality teachers. She also talked about the induction that they have for new teachers (new to teaching and/or new to the district), so that they are ready for the first day of school.

Director Harris asked if this induction was just for special ed certificated staff, and if so, what are we training general ed teachers about special education and working with students. Ms. Campbell talked about the partnering that special ed has been doing with the Star Mentor teachers and the collaboration between gen ed and special ed teachers. They have also continued the induction training throughout the school year, so not just at the beginning of the year.

- Director Mack asked about CAI, and whether that was something new. It was explained that the acronym stood for Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction, and that it isn't new.
- Director DeWolf asked if there was somewhere to find accountability metrics. He wanted to know if he would be able to see the Procedural Guide, and Mr. Jessee explained that it is on the website.
- Director Mack wanted more clarity around the function of fiscal oversight regarding the provision of services. Mr. Jessee explained that once the district identifies dollars for special education funding; it has to be used for students that are identified for students needing special education services. It cannot be used for gen ed students and staffing.
- Ms. Fitch talked about the difficulty in ensuring that services being provided in the schools are consistent. Within the topic of weaknesses, Director Geary thought that one of the weaknesses for students and families, is that there isn't always a consistent culture in the school being respectful and welcoming to students with special needs. Ms. Fitch talked about all of the work that is being done in collaboration with the Special Ed PTSA and families in the communities. Two of the resources that are used to help families are Parent Partners and Parent Liaisons. Parent partners work with families and explain the process for special ed services, and the IEP. Parent liaisons, who are currently in 35 schools, are family members who act as the link between families and administration. Sometimes they are a representative on the PTA, but not necessarily. Inconsistent services and inconsistent cultures on unconditional commitment to students are the issue. Director Geary understands the meeting the needs of families, however feels that there is a bigger piece – who is responsible for the climate of the building: who is responsible for ensuring that students feel welcome?
- Around the topic of compliance, Mr. Jessee pointed out that there were a couple of items listed under threats, not as a weakness. We need to remember that compliance is not just getting the IEP written, we also need for the student to make meaningful progress towards their IEP goals. This cannot just rely on special ed staff. At the UW Special Education Advisory Board meeting that he had attended Wednesday morning they were talking about how do we educate gen ed teachers to support special ed.
- Director Harris asked about the Leadership Learning Days (LLD) for principals and whether or not special education does presentations for principals. Does special ed showcase studies that have gone wrong? Do they talk about data and legal fees? The answer is yes.

- Director Harris also asked whether or not we are moving forward with mediation and support Arc and other advocates. Ms. Fitch answered yes.
- Director Harris also asked about the Educational Directors of Schools (EDS) and when they do school visits, whether or not they are looking at special education services in the schools. She noticed that it seems like some schools are doing a great job while others are not. She wanted to know whether or not we are doubling down on the schools that are outliers. Mr. Jessee said that we are training school leaders, and that they try to work with the EDS, sometimes Student Support Services steps in and works with the school.
- Director Patu asked if an IEP for a student stayed with the student throughout the grade and/or school. The general answer is that yes, students may have an IEP throughout their education, but there are occasions where a student may no longer qualify for services and is exited.
- Director Mack was interested in the feedback mechanism throughout the years that shows that there is an IEP in place and that there is progress monitoring. For example, if she receives a complaint that a student is owed 100 minutes of service and it still hasn't been provided, what is the feedback to ensure that the services are being provided? Ms. Campbell explained the structure of the regional supervisors and program specialists. The program specialists check in with staff in the schools, and the supervisors check in with the principals.
- Director DeWolf wondered with the budget constraints caused us to be more worried about compliance. Ms. Campbell replied that compliance is a concern, but that if a school is struggling that the supervisors and program specialists are there to provide coaching and support. Mr. Jessee said that while we can do oversight and guidance, we cannot do it all. Working with principals has turned the corner for some schools, but there is still work to be done.

Moving on, Chief Jessee said that while there are some concerns, the special education department has also had some wins. The graduation rate for students receiving special education services has outpaced general education students. Starting employment for special education teachers at start of school has moved up from 91% to 96%. A recent article in the Seattle Times stated that there are more vacancies for special education teachers than there are people graduating to teach. Also, the post-secondary rate of Seattle Public School students is higher than the state average.

- Director DeWolf said that we should celebrate our accomplishments. He was also curious about the racial breakdown of students.
- Director Harris would like for us to have more communications and wants to have more information in the form of a Friday Memo. Wants us to be loud and proud.

The next topic was around accomplishments. Chief Jessee discussed the different roles that the directors had: Ms. Mills works with the Educational Service Districts (ESDs), Ms. Campbell has

been working with the union. Ms. Campbell talked about the partnering during bargaining that has happened with the Seattle Education Association (SEA), the Educational Staff Associates (ESAs) and teachers to come up with a plan around stipends for staff and it is tied to the timeliness of IEPs. We are also collaborating about working with students and flexible staffing.

- Director Geary was interested in the work that is being done in conjunction with the Career Technical Education (CTE) component. She has not heard or seen much about educating parents around the pathway of CTE. Chief Jessee said that we can do more, but that we are doing work.

Ms. Mills talked about the exception rate for IEPs and evaluations going down over the last 3 years.

- Director Mack asked for clarity around support for schools. Do we only focus on the 25 Schools of Promise, or do all schools get support? Mr. Jessee explained that all schools get support.

The next part of the presentation was about the organizational chart. Mr. Jessee talked about the big budget cuts that happened before the C-CAP, and how there used to be only 1 regional supervisor and 1 program specialist supporting each region, but now we have 2 program specialists per region. The supervisor and specialists work as a team supporting their schools. Continued to explain about the responsibilities, and that they try to promote from within.

- Director Burke asked about the IEPs and was curious about putting the percentages (for the exception rate) into perspective. How many IEPs are done per month? Ms. Mills said that there were hundreds per month.
- Director Mack appreciated the org chart, and that it looks like there is robust support/services. One of the questions that she gets is how do/should parents raise the issue? Where should a parent go if they have concerns that are not being resolved with their principal? There is contact information on the special education website, and a parent would generally contact the regional supervisor who would process the complaint.

During the review of goals and objectives, Director Mack asked about school psychologists, and was wondering if we had lost a lot of them. Ms. Campbell said yes, that there is a shortage nationally, and that within the district, there have been some retirements and family leave this year.

Regarding the revisioning of special ed placement, Director Mack wanted more information about how the timeline and the intersection of capacity and budget has been improved. Mr. Jessee explained that while we have the process down pretty well, it is an ongoing process since every student counts. For instance, with our fixed model there may be a class that can only have ten students per one teacher/one instructional assistant. If then there are three more students that need the same services, the school may need to have another class. In the meantime, there is another class that provides different services that only has 3 students in it, and you cannot just put the new students into the other class that has a low student count. The boxes without flexibility are hard, and the costs are outpacing the annual budget.

- Director Pinkham noted that looking through the data and overidentifying students, what is the process? Are there really 40% of Native Americans being identified as qualifying? Mr. Jessee moved to the slide showing the data-driven improvement process and how we are trying to improve how we identify students.
- Director Mack understands that the IEP should direct services, but has heard that students are being required to be in an Access or Distinct class while the parents felt that they should be able to be in a general education class. How are the placement decisions made? Ms. Campbell said that the decisions are made in the IEP team, and that parents are part of that team.
- Director Patu knows that students were declared as special education students that were English language learners so may not have understood the language, so how are we looking at that now? How do we differentiate between students not understanding the language vs. having a disability? Mr. Jessee said that this is covered in training for psychologists, and going over information that needs to be understood. If the school does not have a way to support the students, then instead of fast-tracking students to special education, they need to intervene.

Director Geary did a time check at 5:30pm and said that there were 30 minutes left.

In covering metrics, Mr. Jessee wanted to highlight suspensions. We are still disproportionate in the amount of discipline for students who identify as African American who qualify for special education services, even over other ethnic groups who qualify for special education services. We are identifying and supporting at target schools. Director Harris noted that there isn't anything about physical restraint in this presentation. Mr. Jessee said while we track this number, we have not used this as a key performance indicator (KPI), as it is a newer metric for the state. We can put out the proportionality in a Friday Memo. If a school reports a lot of isolation and restraint, then central office provides strong guidance and counseling. Ms. Campbell was out at BF Day when the school had a townhall to address parent concerns around supporting all students, including on the topic of isolation and restraint. The principal took the parents to the room in question and then answered their questions. At the end of the evening, the parents felt that they were heard and supported. The principal had exceeded their expectations.

Budget and staffing information was on the next slide, and Mr. Jessee pointed out that it is easy to see that the costs keep increasing. Director Mack wanted more clarity around the dollar amounts on the slide – do these amounts include teachers and IAs that are in the buildings? Mr. Jessee explained that these are just the dollars that central office controls, and that it does not include teachers and IAs assigned through the Weighted Student Staffing (WSS) that are in the schools. Nursing services are also not included in these amounts since they (nurses) are under Coordinated School Health.

When looking at the benchmarking slide, Mr. Jessee wanted to reiterate that it is not exactly like looking at apples to apples since different districts compile their costs differently. Seattle's special education budget is currently 19% of the overall budget, but in the past it was only

13%, and in the next couple of years it will be at 21% of the entire budget. It is becoming a disproportionate amount of the budget. As a district we need to think about a more preventative approach rather than moving straight to special education services.

- Director Mack appreciated what was being said, and that it comes down to appropriate services for schools. She wondered how many schools have a .2 nurse, no counselor, and may not have an assistant principal. She also wondered what central office is doing to assess in partnership with principals what the needs are and is it going to be appropriate if there is another issue with classrooms not having the support. What is the balance between the school's building leadership team (BLT) decision to what would actually be appropriate?
- Director Burke wanted to have a better understanding around the benchmarking information and enrollment. What is the longer trend for enrollment vs cost/student expense? Mr. Jessee said the costs are relatively the same, but there has been an increase in enrollment for students receiving special education services the last couple of years. Portland's cost per student is an outlier, because they have some of their services provided by the county, so it is not included in the district costs.
- Director Harris had a question around BLT training and whether or not BLTs get training on these issues since they are the ones that approve a school budget.
- Director Pinkham clarified that the student enrollment for the benchmark slide meant the same as students with an IEP.
- Director Harris asked if 504 students were counted in special ed and the answer is no.

Mr. Jessee moved on to the policies and procedures that guide the department's work.

- Director Geary asked about what roadblocks and/or changes to policies and procedures could be brought to the Board. Mr. Jessee said that the student assignment plan needs to be simplified so that is clear to parents.
- Director Mack thinks that student enrollment and program placement is still an issue.

Around the slide that showed the major contracts that the Special Education department has, these are not the only contracts that they have.

- Director Geary asked about the Maxim contract and noted that it is now about to be about \$900k. Ms. Mills said that this has happened because another contract was ended. She also said that the Seneca Family of Agencies contract will be modified down which will help balance the cost associated in the Maxim contract.
- Director Harris asked about some of the services being contracted being moved in house and whether or not this is happening. Mr. Jessee, said that yes some of the services are being brought in house, but that services that Experimental Education Unit (EEU) provides is something that can not be replicated. The SPP+ classes are helping us get closer to that approach.

Moving on to looking forward and next steps, Mr. Jessee wanted to highlight the need to balance compliance with evidence-based approaches. As a district we need to shift the culture to take action at the school level. We need to use cross-departmental relationships to shift the culture and instructional practices.

- Director Geary would like to hear the cross-walk about how the strategic plan will permeate work.
- Director Pinkham asked about data around students who are identified as twice exceptional (2E), are there many students? The directors from special education did not have an exact number however, thought that there are about 340 students who are identified. Director Pinkham would like to see that information in the report.
- Director Burke talked about identification and want to make sure that we don't lose sight that at the core of Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS), there may be instructional practices that may lead to the overidentification of special education students and/or advanced learners.

This session recessed at 6:05 pm.

### **Executive Session**

At 6:05 p.m., Director Harris announced that the Board was immediately recessing the Board Special Meeting into executive session to evaluate the performance of a public employee, and the session was scheduled for approximately 30 minutes, with an anticipated end time of 6:45 p.m.

Director Harris called the executive session to order at 6:15 p.m. Directors Burke, DeWolf, Geary, Harris, Mack, Patu, and Pinkham were present. Superintendent Juneau was also present.

At 6:45 p.m., Director Harris announced that the executive session to evaluate the performance of a public employee, was now expected to go an additional 15 minutes, with an anticipated end time of 7:00 p.m.

At 7:00 p.m., Director Harris recessed out of the executive session. The Special Meeting reconvened at 7:00 p.m. and there being no further business to come before the Board, Director Harris adjourned the special meeting at 7:00 p.m.