

**MINUTES OF HISD BOARD OF EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION
AD HOC COMMITTEE MEETING**

April 26, 2018

Committee Members Present:

Anne Sung (Chairperson)
Jackie Anderson
Jackie Cross-Ecford
Hannah Mose-Harvey
Shana Halvorsen

Holly Maria Flynn Vilaseca
Elizabeth Santos
Joshua Rotenberg
Jamie Wilkes

Administrative Resources Present:

Dr. Joan Anderson, Assistant Superintendent for
Special Education (HISD)
Hans Graff, Deputy General Counsel (HISD)
Lisa McBride, Board Counsel, Thompson & Horton LLP
Tammy Spencer (Interventions Office – Dyslexia)
Obed Franco (Interventions Office – Dyslexia)
Dr. Courtney Busby (Director – Interventions Office)

AGENDA

OPEN SESSION

1. **Call to Order.** Trustee Sung called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m. Committee members and administrative personnel present introduced themselves.
2. **Special Education Update.** Dr. Anderson updated the Committee concerning the Department's plans for the upcoming Parent Summit and provided a first draft of the event program. Spanish language sessions will be available to attendees. Child care also will be provided. The event program will include a listing of special education liaisons and social workers as well as the schools they support.

SSOs will be available at the event for private conversations with parents who so desire. Department staff will capture all parent questions so that the District can provide appropriate further follow-up after the event.

Dr. Anderson extended an invitation to the Committee to attend the parent summit.

Committee members asked whether parent summit presentation materials would be made available on the District's website. Dr. Anderson explained that some of the scheduled external presenters have been hesitant to make their presentations available on the web.

Dr. Anderson will keep working with presenters on this issue and will update the Committee with any new information.

Principals are responding to requests for names for the Special Education Advisory Committee. The current deadline to provide names to Dr. Anderson is the end of April 2018. Dr. Anderson wants broad representation on the Advisory Committee.

Dr. Anderson next updated the Committee on the Department's strategic plan. Her team is analyzing where to start. The consensus has been to start with the "low-hanging" fruit first, such as an overhaul of the District's special education website to make it more user-friendly for parents and other external stakeholders. The plan is to remove outdated information and internal-use only forms so the site is less overwhelming and less confusing for parents.

Feedback from surveys has been that professional development at HISD tends to be more compliance-based than instructional. This was surprising, so the Department is adjusting future professional development to include more instructional strategies.

Dr. Anderson is receiving feedback from teachers, principals, SSOs and central office personnel regarding additional professional development needed for the 2018-2019 school year. These stakeholders have met once and will meet again in early May to make additional adjustments to next year's professional development offerings.

Increased instructional focus in professional development offerings was a recommendation of the AIR Report. The Department plans to address this recommendation by designing professional development for specific content areas (i.e., math, English, science, etc.)

The Committee began a question and answer session with the Administrative resources present.

Committee: When will the formal strategic plan be released?

C. Busby: We will present the plan in June 2018. We will first share it with Chief Longoria and the Board.

Dr. Anderson: The Committee will get a preview of the plan by the end of school year.

Committee: I think the Department's strategic plan should include the school improvement plan. The purpose of the special education component of school plans should be to accomplish the Department's strategic plan at the campus level. Campus goals should align with the strategic plan. Parents should be able to see the impact of professional development on teachers at the campus.

[L. McBride had to step out of room]

The Committee discussed applications received by Dr. Anderson for the Special Education Advisory Committee.

Dr. Anderson: I can put together a table of the number of applicants for the Special Education Advisory Committee received by Trustee district.

Committee: We do not want to delay the application process, but we want to ensure diverse representation on the committee.

Committee: At the campus level, we are not hearing about Committee nominations or a sense of urgency. Advertisement in the weekly academic memo is not enough.

Committee: If I tell folks to sign up to be on the Committee, where do I tell them to go?

Dr. Anderson: The academic services memo outlines the process. The memo includes a committee description, and instructions for turning the application in to me.

Committee: Do you have an evaluation tool to determine additional staffing resources needed by the Department?

The Committee discussed the need for additional BCBAs (Board Certified Behavior Analysts) at HISD and how to determine when additional BCBAs are needed.

Dr. Anderson: We are working on beefing up behavior support district-wide. We have asked for additional behavior resources. We also have requested additional personnel, including evaluation personnel.

Additionally, we are addressing TEA's corrective action plan just released this week.

Committee: What about getting paraprofessionals certified as "behavior techs"? The District can start grooming its own behavior support professionals. You need to build relationships with the University of Houston, Clear Lake and Victoria.

Dr. Anderson: I am interested in hearing more about this. Please forward additional information to me.

A Committee member raised a concern about the District's former BCBA monitoring the STAAR exam. Dr. Anderson explained the limited circumstances under which the District's BCBA was monitoring STAAR exams. The Committee expressed their lack of support for this and questioned whether other resources could be used to discharge this task.

The Committee resumed discussion of applications to the Advisory Committee. Dr. Anderson explained that she has sent information twice by Academic Services memo, but will send it out another way, in hopes of generating a better response.

3. **Dyslexia Services.** The Chair opened the floor to the administrative resources present to provide an overview of what the District needs in terms of Board support in this area. Dr. Courtney Busby (Director, HISD Interventions Office) explained that she recently submitted a proposal to expand the dyslexia team to include centrally funded positions to provide services, hopefully alleviating some of the pressure on campus budgets.

Dr. Busby also explained that the Department also has applied for a dyslexia training/professional development grant to provide professional development to the full spectrum of individuals providing instruction to students.

Dr. Busby introduced the Committee to Tammy Spencer and Obed Franco, who work with dyslexia in HISD's Interventions Office. Ms. Spencer and Mr. Franco outlined additional Department initiatives, including sending cohorts of teachers, starting with those in most need, through Module I from the Texas Dyslexia series. Ms. Spencer and Mr. Franco explained that new teachers will receive an additional six-hour training, which will cover dyslexia identification. The District also is contracting with Neuhaus Education Center to use one Dyslexia program across all campuses. Using Easy IEP, the District can track lessons completed, and this information can travel with students from school to school. Once trained under this program, teachers are characterized as certified teachers with dyslexia training. Once trained, a teacher can work with all dyslexia students –There is a single curriculum which can be individualized to meet the needs of the student.

The Committee discussed the importance of applying the program with fidelity, which needs to be a non-negotiable.

4. **Board Policies/Administrative Regulations.**

- a. The Committee discussed **Administrative Regulation BOB2** concerning campus-based decision-making committees (SDMCs), and its associated Board Policy. State law requires that, to the extent practicable, committees should include at least one representative who is a special education teacher. HISD's local policy and administrative regulations do not contain this language. There was consensus on the Committee that local policy (and the associated administrative regulation) should be changed to include this requirement, specifically "teachers of special populations" to be inclusive of special education, G/T, and ELL teachers. Next steps are to present this to the Board Policy Committee for the local policy change and to the department responsible for the administrative regulation for the regulation change.
- b. The Committee discussed **Board Policy EHBAB** which states that a private service provider cannot provide services on campus. The Committee engaged in

a question and answer with Associate General Counsel, Hans Graff, concerning Board Policy EHBAB and the risks associated with allowing service providers on campus during the instructional day. The Committee discussed potential solutions, but ultimately returned to its general concern that HISD needs additional BCBA's. The Administration is currently working to find qualified personnel to fill this position.

- c. The Committee discussed **school improvement plans**. General Committee comments concerning school improvement plans included:

School improvement plans should include professional development to be approved by special education department.

Committee members agreed that the term "special populations" is more inclusive than "special education").

School improvement plan goals should include resources for special populations.

When a principal has to pay out compensatory services, it should be mandatory for that principal to have to sit down to review the goals and professional development outlined in the school improvement plan.

How much thought do principals put into the school improvement plan? Does it really guide strategy?

It's a compliance piece. It's not really reviewed. It's a check off for most principals/campuses.

The Board sees the improvement plan executive summary, not the full report. SSOs focus on certain aspects of the executive summary, but not necessarily the full report. Some SSOs have experience in special populations and others do not. For this reason, we need special education department involvement in school improvement plans to hold principals accountable.

The school improvement plan committee votes on the plan but does not necessarily participate in drafting it. It is drafted mostly by the principal and his/her leadership team.

A few years ago, when HISD did a professional learning series at NRG, there was a real focus on using the school improvement plan to drive campus strategy and decisions. SSOs met with principals using the school improvement plan and campus data. This process helped to drive home the importance of the school improvement plan. We need to return to this approach.

Principals need to do a deep dive again regarding the importance of school improvement plans and how they drive decisions on campus. Principals should constantly be pulling out the school improvement plans to drive decision-making.

5. **General Discussion.** The Committee posed several questions and topics for further discussion:

- a. Will special education be centralized or decentralized next year?
- b. When will the District decide which programs are staying on which campuses?
- c. HISD has not staffed programs for next year so parents do not know where there students will go. Parent expectations are sometimes hijacked at last minute.
- d. Traumatic Brain Injury (“TBI”) numbers at HISD seem low based on national trends. Where are the rest of these students? The District needs to better train evaluation specialists. These students may be labeled as OHI, ADHD, etc.
- e. Reauthorization of in-district charters: If the District has questions around special education at an in-district charter, the District should require that those are answered before the Administration recommends re-authorization.
- f. When will the District hold principals accountable for accepting all students including students with disabilities?
- g. Centralization of special education has two components:
 1. budget
 2. decisions

Committee members agree that both should be centralized.

- h. If special education remains decentralized, there will continue to be a lack of consistent/equitable decision-making.

6. **Next Steps.**

- a. Review the AIR Report and determine if any areas are missing.
- b. Give feedback to Dr. Joan Anderson concerning the District’s strategic plan concerning special education.

Information needed from Dr. Anderson for next meeting:

Budget information, including but not limited to:

- a) Numbers of teachers, diagnosticians and therapists
- b) Number of trainings

- c) Legal fees
- d) Other costs, including compensatory education and private schools.

7. **Adjournment.** The meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

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