

# Memo

To: Philip Conrad, Superintendent

From: Marianne Vines, Director of Special Education

cc: Tricia Clifford, Assistant Superintendent, Julie Kirrane, Finance Director,

Date: January 8, 2020

Re: School Committee Questions

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Although I was not present at the school committee meeting last Tuesday, January 5, I was viewing the meeting. A few school committee members posed questions specific to special education and I thought it might be helpful if I provided some answers prior to your next meeting.

The questions were regarding the SAIL program, the recommendation for hiring additional related service providers and ESY/Compensatory services.

- **SAIL Program:** I oversee the district SAIL program. At each building level, there is a special education program administrator that oversees the day-to-day operation of the program. I meet with all of the program administrators as a group each Friday where we can discuss the programs as a whole group. I also meet individually weekly or biweekly with each program administrator to discuss the building programming. Additionally, we have contracted with New England Center for Children (NECC) to provide weekly consultation to the programs at Davis, Lane and JGMS. The consultants meet with the program administrators at each visit. I have a monthly meeting with the consultants to debrief. In addition to building based team meetings, we have a monthly vertical SAIL meeting that has been run by me where we talk about behaviors, methodologies, criteria, specific cases and strategies. The SAIL teachers, BCBAs, adjustment counselors and speech and language pathologists from each program attend. We have an agenda that always includes time for staff members to problem solve with their peers. This year due to COVID and scheduling, we are running an elementary meeting and a secondary meeting instead.

Regarding the transition of the program from Lane to JGMS, we do believe that we will have a full program. There will be a small start next year and a larger cohort transitioning

the following year. We continue to evaluate the program and student progress. We are pleased by the progress that we are seeing and we are confident the students that are participating in the program are appropriately placed.

- **Related Service Providers:**

SLP- Speech Language Pathologist

SLPA- Speech Language Pathologist Assistant

OT- Occupational Therapist

COTA- Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant

Mr. Morrison posed a question about the chart on page 18 of the budget proposal. In the narrative, it says, "it is reasonable for a 1.0 FTE SLP or OT to have a caseload between 35 and 75 with the support of a COTA or SLPA. In the chart, we indicate that there are currently 96 students at Davis requiring Speech services and I have requested 3.0 SLPs. That would bring the caseload to 32 per SLP. There are several reasons why we requested 3 SLPs rather than the addition of SLPAs:

- Special education numbers change daily, particularly at the Davis School. Historically, when collecting data for budget season, we have used the data available when we report the October SIMS data. At that moment in time, there were 96 students; however, we can project that those numbers will increase exponentially by the end of the school year. The caseload numbers can be deceiving because they do not describe the intensity of service. In grades PreK-2, students often require more service time than a student in grade 6. A student in Kindergarten or grade 1 is more likely to see an SLP one to three times per week for service. A student in 6th grade may receive service once a week or may even require just a consult. That can greatly impact the SLPs daily workload.
- An SLPA cannot evaluate students and requires oversight from an SLP. This would mean that our most qualified staff would always be evaluating, reporting at meetings and providing oversight to the SLPA rather than providing direct service to our youngest students. We felt that it would be more advantageous for the students and the SLPs if we hire the most experienced staff to share the large evaluation and service caseloads.
- Speech and language delays can be an indicator of reading difficulties. Research points to the importance of early interventions for improving the effectiveness of remediation. Our SLPs play a key role in intervening.
- In the younger grades, we are learning about students and concerns that may arise with their learning. A more experienced staff would allow us to provide more screenings and consultation for students prior to them requiring special education services.

All of the additional SLPs, SLPAs and COTAs that I have proposed would be full time employees. Each of the SLPAs and COTAs is overseen by an SLP or an OT.

Effective September 2020, two Certified Occupational Therapy Assistants (COTA) and two Speech and Language Pathology Assistant (SLPA) have been hired for additional

support. This support has resulted in an immediate increase in time for therapists to complete observations and evaluations, increase in percentage of sessions, increase in collaboration time and meeting participation for therapists, and time efficiency. Feedback that I have received from parents and therapists has been positive.

- **Extended School Year (ESY) and Compensatory Services:**

We have already scheduled our first ESY planning meeting to take place on January 20. We anticipate providing those services in person. We also anticipate that we will have

slightly more students than we have in previous years, however, not as many as we serviced remotely last summer. Because we were able to be proactive and provide additional services to so many children last summer, we have not had an extensive need to provide compensatory services.

We started having meetings with parents on compensatory services in October. We still have more meetings to hold. We have identified some students that require compensatory services. Their needs vary greatly, therefore the recommendations for how to provide those services are provided has varied greatly. Some students are receiving those services during the school day now, some after school and we have recommended that some receive those services in the summer. We will continue to work with families to provide services in a way that makes sense for the student, the family and the district.

If I can be of more assistance or provide more information, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

*Marianne*