

District Advisory Council Notes
March 13, 2019

BOARD UPDATE

School Board Member Gwynetta S. Gittens attended as the board representative. Ms. Gittens referred to teacher pay and need for affordable housing as the elephant in the room and said the school board is working to attract more teachers and to ensure teacher pay means a livable wage. Ms. Gittens also said that the board is having a workshop on transparency to define what transparency is and what it looks like in the community so that everyone is on the same page. They are also having a safety and security workshop with law enforcement (planned for the first of April).

INCLUSION

The Exceptional Student Education Leadership team (ESE) for the district led by Jessica Duncan, Director and Theresa Bowen, assistant director includes coordinators for exceptional student education, Amy Burke, Susan Ellington, Robin Frank, Amy McLean, Diedre Phillips and Lori Witt, along with the inclusion support team of Lisa Flannery and Rachel Taylor who are learning resource specialists, and Tressa Duncan, Florida Inclusion Network specialist.

As presented by the ESE team, **Inclusion is legally described as students with disabilities being educated alongside their peers who do not have disabilities to the greatest extent appropriate.** From an educational perspective inclusion means that to the maximum extent possible students with IEPs receive supports where curriculum is being taught where students without IEPs are learning as well. The support is not a one-size fits all approach, but emphasizes the importance of individualized inquiry. In addition there is a societal goal that all students with disabilities are accepted and seen as full members of their school and their community. **The state target is that 85 percent of all students with disabilities (SWDs) will spend 80 percent (or more) of each school week participating alongside non-disabled peers. For 2017-2018, Lee County was at 80 percent of that target.**

Further, Section 1003.57(1)(a), F.S. Defines inclusion to mean "...a student with a disability receiving education in a general education regular class setting, reflecting natural proportions and age-appropriate at heterogeneous groups in core academic and elective or special areas within the school community; a student with a disability is a valued member of the classroom and school community; the teachers and administrators support universal education and have knowledge and support available to enable them to effectively teach all children; and access is provided to technical assistance in best practices, instructional methods, and supports tailor to the students needs based on current research."

Separating students with disabilities from the general educational environment should only occur when the nature or severity of the disability means that education in regular classes cannot be satisfactorily achieved even with the use of supplementary aids and services.

Students should be in Least Restrictive Environments (LRE). The supports for inclusive educational practices provided in the district are: technical assistance, support and follow up to schools; training for administrators, teachers, and paraprofessional; flexible scheduling facilitation; and collaboration with discretionary projects (FIN/FDLRS).

Once every three years the school districts do an internal assessment on their inclusive practices. Each district completes a Best Practices for Inclusive Education (BPIE) assessment with a Florida Inclusion Network facilitator. The results, along with long-term and short term plans for improvement efforts are included in the district's ESE policies and procedures.

Inclusion is not about teachers working harder, it's about working smarter and with implementation of high-yield strategies research shows that what is good for the general students is good for all students, including those with disabilities. An example was given for fifth grade regular standards of learning the organs of the human body where a student with a disability was given an access point to the learning. The general education students focused on the core curriculum and the student with the disability worked with a peer buddy on a presentation for the class with the location of all the organs of the body. All the students in the class benefitted from the presentation to the class. The student with the disability was able to learn the same material alongside his peers using an instructional access point. Inclusion is more than physical proximity. It is about intentionally planning for all students. Some considerations are: flexible scheduling, classroom make-up (not every student is the same so must look at each individual student), teacher/substitute shortages (especially in special education), accessing supplementary aids and services, people first language (talking about people first, not their disability. For example, the student with autism rather than the autistic kid), perceptions, responsible inclusion (move forward with a student focus), and extensive accommodations.

One concern is the automatic and mandatory retention of third graders who do not pass the FSA regardless of disability. The team is hoping to have the state review the statute so that students could be considered individually.

Lee County is also home to Best Buddies and Special Olympics which brought Unified Sports to the area. These organizations partner with the schools to create and provide support inside and outside the classroom. The Best Buddies program is currently in the following schools in the district: Fort Myers High, Ida Baker High, Lehigh Senior High, Riverdale High, Estero High, Naples High, Manatee Middle, Gateway Charter Intermediate, Varsity Lakes Middle, Caloosa Middle, Corkscrew Middle, The Sanibel School, Tortuga Preserve Elementary, Babcock Neighborhood School, Gulf Elementary, Rayma C. Page Elementary, Manatee Elementary and Skyline Elementary.

There were questions regarding the meaning of Least Restrictive Environments (LREs) which is the greatest extent students with disabilities can be with general education population and still be successful. There were also questions about flexible scheduling and whether or not it is

optional and how funding is determined. There is not necessarily a formula for funding and each student is looked at individually to decide funding. If the school doesn't have the funding they reach out to the district and they work together to find solutions.

Behavior issues and disruptions were also addressed and the group was reminded that students with disabilities aren't the only ones who cause disruptions and that disruptive behaviors should be looked at on an individual basis. Sometimes strategies in the classroom can be implemented or changed to address behavior issues.

BREAKOUT SESSION

We played a kahoot.it game about what we had learned regarding inclusion and discussed that peers learn better from peers. Also discussed were the stress the timer on the star test gives kids with anxiety, and the participation in Special Olympics and Best Buddies programs and their eagerness to be involved in all Lee County schools.

Breakouts were mostly presentations so no new issues were presented to the larger group for consideration.

THE NEXT MEETINGS ARE APRIL 17 AND MAY 15.

ADJOURNMENT