

Watertown Commission on Disability Public Meeting Minutes from January 16, 2008

**In attendance: Bob Hall, Alex Liazos, Anne Doughty, Gayle Shattuck, Carol Menton, Andrea Greenwood, Arturo DeLucca
Lisa Bing (ASL), Stefanie Farrell (CART)
George Donahue and Kim Charlson were both sick.
Marilyn Devaney was at a budget meeting and joined the WCOD at 8:00**

Audience/guests: Elisabeth Schaefer, Director of Student Services; Fred Isaacs, SEPAC; Jonathan Spiller, David Spiller

**Meeting called to order at 7:07
Communication protocol reviewed.**

Elisabeth Schaefer was invited to present information about special education services. Three handouts had been mailed electronically before the meeting, and were available at the meeting as well. These handouts included information on funding streams, a bar graph of tuition costs for out of district placements, and a page with synopses of six areas within special education which are current foci. These handouts and the list of questions should be attached to the minutes of this meeting.

The first 50 minutes of the meeting were essentially a Q&A about special education in Watertown. Elisabeth Schaefer presented information, and responded to questions asked by all members of the WCOD. She said that the goal now is more program development, because inclusion is not working for all kids in the same way, and so we need to look at what we can do in addition. Also, she wanted to address how to do better what is already being being done.

Ms. Schaefer reviewed the list of classes and programs which have been added to special education services this year, including the work of the Program Development subcommittee of SEPAC, which is presenting to the School Committee on January 22. At Hosmer, there is a new language based class; a new behavioral class; a new teacher to provide services for those with autism. At Lowell, there is an opportunity room for children needing a break or a change in environment; a K/1 class being team taught with regular and special ed teachers, and a new autism teacher doing inclusion services. The Middle School has a new autism teacher and there is a new short term placement for students who are transitioning back in to school. The Program committee is recommending more training on specific special needs. Two trainings for paraprofessionals have already happened.

In response to a question from Alex Liazos about compliance with DOE, Ms Schaefer explained that many of the issues were about timing and paperwork. This involved evaluations, IEP development, trainings, parent notification, and record

keeping. Watertown had been out of compliance in 80% of the areas evaluated. She made the distinction between being out of compliance on paperwork vs. doing the services well, but said that plans for achieving compliance had been made, and now were being followed.

In response to a question from Ann Doughty, Ms. Schaefer spoke about assistive technology as an exciting area in which change was emerging rapidly. This area will now be projected into the budget.

Bob Hall asked about health and recreational programs and equipment for those with special needs; whether or not there is adaptive equipment readily available for those who need it. This question requires research.

While Ms Schaefer did not have readily available a breakdown on the percentage of students on 504 plans vs. IEPs, or at what school level the demands for services were greatest, she did say that there are 550 children on IEPs; or 19% of the students. She said the number of out of district placements had been fairly steady. The driving cause for out of district placements seems to be social/emotional needs; and that even though the numbers of children with autism-spectrum issues are increasing, that is not increasing the need for placements.

In response to a question from Gayle Shattuck about post school plans and vocational training, Ms Schaefer said that we do have a high percentage of children who go on to college, and we are developing relationships with colleges which provide services to those with special educational needs. She said there is a need to look into transition services.

A follow up meeting between WCOD and WPS is planned for April.

Break : 8:02-8:15

Anne Doughty summarized the concerns and plans for the Spillers. Jonathan Spiller has been looking for housing for a long time, and had been told that the public housing was closed. (This point was clarified; the public housing has a very, very long waiting list) Jonathan and David Spiller will meet with Watertown Community Housing, and then follow up with Anne.

Correspondence: A very nice letter of thanks from the secretary of SEPAC was distributed.

Minutes: A motion to accept the December minutes was made by Alex; seconded by Marilyn. Passed.

Treasurer's report. Because there has been no updated report, the December report is still in effect.

Safety and Access. Discussion about the state of sidewalks and need to enforce the ordinance requiring businesses to clear their walks within 24 hours. Gayle will contact police to check in with business owners; Alex will write a letter to the TAB

Captioning. Carol, Gayle and Tamara have been in communication and are setting up a meeting.

Bus stop. No update.

Announcements/ Other Business

Marilyn noted that the date on the agenda was wrong, and a change was made to bring us into 2008!

A proposal to add a meeting in February was floated. We will decide via e-mail whether to do this.

The regional meeting of Commissions on Disability will be held at the Watertown Free Public Library on May 28, from 10-2.

Gayle reported the receipt of open space plans and an invoice from Adaptive Environments, which dates from 2005. She recapped the history of this project, and noted that the record is not clear on how much money had been allocated for this project, or whether a contract had been signed. The invoice is for \$12,500. Further research into this is needed. Gayle suggested inviting Joe Merkl (Planning Dept.) and Chris Hart (Adaptive Environments) to unveil the plan, etc.

Marilyn expressed her disappointment at needing to be at the budget meeting during the special education portion of the WCOD meeting.

Adjourn: Motion made by Alex, seconded by Anne. Passed. Adjourned at 9:02

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Greenwood