

RSU 9 Special Services Board Update 2/8/2022

The Special Services Department was facing a considerable task heading into the 21-22 school year with two major issues: a staffing shortage at the end of the school year, along with a backlog of evaluations from the 20-21 school year that were not able to be completed due to Covid-19 restrictions and student availability as well as a reduced number of school psychologists employed by RSU9. Given the circumstances of education during a pandemic these were quite considerable concerns indeed. The relaxation of any obligations under Federal or State law has not occurred at any point during the current pandemic, nor is any anticipated. Therefore, all the requirements for the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education have remained in place to this day and SAU's must ensure that Individual Education Plans are implemented.

At the end of June - We experienced the following teaching and professional staff vacancies due to retirements, moves or job changes :

Position Vacancies on June 30, 2021	Position Vacancies as of 2/8/2022
K-5 Teachers = 7	2
6-8 Teachers = 3	0
9-12 Teachers = 3	1*
School Psychologists = 1	1
Speech Pathologist = 1	1*
Social Workers = 1	1 (elem)

Currently, in the hiring process - Are candidates for one elementary teaching and a social work position, a speech pathologist and one High School teaching position all of which are encouraging. Educational Technician vacancies have been improving yet continue to average around 22 positions. Overall, the department as a whole remains lean yet our staff is, through their hard work and dedication, able to support our students as effectively as possible. (Without the addition of our Special Ed. Coordinators I am not sure this would have been possible.)

Some Facts and Figures of note

- Students with Disabilities in RSU9 = 403 (down a little from last year but 23 students currently in the referral process)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder = 59, Emotional Disturbance = 33, Intellectual Disability = 21
- Multiple Disabilities = 31, Orthopedic Impairment = 1, Other Health Impairment = 54,
- Speech and Language Disorder = 71.
- Projected CDS preschoolers enrolling in the fall of 2022 = 17 (this tends to grow).

Psychological evaluations completed - Thus far for 2021-22 = 85. Our backlog from the 20-21 school year has been completed. We are anticipating additional evaluations for new referrals and regularly scheduled 3 year reevaluations. For reference, in 16-17 there were 138 total evaluations for the year and in 17-18, 114! Currently there are 23 referrals being completed.

It is important to note that during the 2020-21 school year we prioritized initial evaluations to ensure that we followed our Child Find obligations first and foremost. This was common practice

around the country. During the summer of 2021 we contracted with the Southern Maine Administrative Collaborative as well as two independent psychologists to complete our backlog of evaluations. Our district psychologist, Christine Gatto-Shea, worked tirelessly to complete evaluations and provide guidance to our contracted psychology team. A TEAM effort!

Blue Ink - To facilitate the receipt of signatures for numerous documents our department has purchased a contract with Blue-Ink which is a secure online platform for securing remote signatures. This has been extremely successful and efficient both in terms of saving time and meeting timelines.

MDOE Monitoring - We have submitted the required documents and are working with MDOE for our regularly scheduled district monitoring by MDOE. This monitoring is a federally mandated process to ensure the observance of IDEA law and Maine special education regulation. This occurs every 4 years in Maine.

Professional Development - Has been a priority and focus for the 2021-22 school year given the number of new staff who are either emergency certified (N=6), conditionally certified or teachers with 3 or fewer years of experience. We have provided tiered level of supports for staff this year that have included the following:

- Mentoring and Targeted Coaching
- Literacy Development and instruction training
- Late Arrival Wednesday topics, office hours for technical assistance/support via zoom.
- Consultation with contracted providers for coaching and development.
- Executive Functioning workshops
- Two Day summer training for special education staff.(Summer 2021)
- Facilitated team meetings
- MDOE training opportunities.
- Learning and the Brain workshops
- Ongoing professional development opportunities for related service professionals.
- SpecialEdConnection subscription for all district administrators.
- Ongoing Safety Care training for direct staff and administrators.

*School psychology services are being provided via contracted services pending our hiring of an additional school psychologist.