



Hopkinton School District

**To: Steve Chamberlin, Superintendent
Hopkinton School Board**
From: Valerie Aubry, Director of Student Services
Date: 1/29/10
Re: Student Services Update

It is hard to believe that we are almost halfway through the school year. As usual, the Student Services teachers, counselors, specialists, and support staff have been busy keeping up with evaluations, instruction, parent/student team meetings, IEPs, progress reports, and interventions. In the past few months Student Services has focused efforts in many areas.

State Data Indicators and December First Compliance—Special Education is a field closely monitored by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the NH Department of Education (NHDOE). Throughout the school year educational data regarding the identification of students in need of special education and the services provided to them are entered into the state system, collated, and then sent to the federal system. December first is one of the dates when this data is reviewed and evaluated on an annual basis for compliance with all regulations and timelines. The “count” of students whose data indicates full compliance is then used in determining the next year’s allocation of IDEA federal funding to individual school districts. This year’s reports from the NHDOE have reflected the diligence of special educators and services providers in Hopkinton in demonstrating compliance for all our students. In addition, we have recently received word that the full analysis of Hopkinton’s Data Indicators for the 2008-09 school year has resulted in our designation as a district that *Meets Requirements*, the highest rating possible.

Harold Martin Preschool—As indicated at a recent School Board meeting, the District Preschool is thriving. With the skilled guidance of Barbara Houldsworth, Coordinator/Teacher, we have been able to maintain a 50/50 integration of students with disabilities with their typically developing peers. As the number of special needs students has increased, care has been required to keep this balance within state guidelines for an integrated preschool while not exceeding appropriate daily enrollments in a class of three to five year olds. If the proportion of students with disabilities were to rise above the 50% level, the Preschool would be designated a special education program and more restrictive requirements would apply. Current information suggests that in the near future we will be able to maintain our integrated preschool without additional sessions, but predicting the number and severity of student needs is difficult this far in advance. As part of a state-wide initiative, Barbara Houldsworth and I have been working with Community Bridges Early Supports and Services to develop smoother transitions of students between our two systems. A Memo of Understanding is close being finalized.

IDEA ARRA Expenditures—The ARRA stimulus funding has continued to be helpful in increasing time, tools, and training for special educators and the students they serve in ways that might otherwise not have been possible. As promised earlier, Hopkinton has been reimbursed on a monthly basis for expenditures including new technology, software, specialized equipment, instructional materials, comprehensive test kits, consultants, professional development, and instructional materials.

The ARRA funding has allowed us to plan ahead and prepare staff and educational facilities for future needs as well as more immediate concerns. Our next project with these funds will be to renovate space at the middle high school to accommodate students whose educational needs vary more significantly from the general curriculum. In designing and renovating space, we are working carefully to follow all federal and state guidelines regarding acceptable special education expenditures and construction requirements.

Professional Development for Special Educators and Support Staff—Opportunities this year have included or will include the following:

- Teachers and support staff attended workshops on differentiating instruction for students who struggle with mathematics at both the elementary and secondary levels. The hands-on techniques learned will be shared with all the Instructional Assistants K-6 during the Early Release Day, February 3rd.
- Special Educators are working with classroom teachers to determine power standards and construct common assessments in content areas.
- Instructional Assistants at the Middle High School will be learning about providing instruction using the *Read Naturally* computer-based program on February 3rd. They will also learn about techniques to help students maintain attention during classes over the course of the school day.
- Our school psychologist and behavior specialists will be working together during the Early Release to coordinate documentation and programming for behavior across the District.
- Special educators have attended workshops on *Just Words*, a new component of the Wilson Reading Program that will be used to instruct struggling readers.

The purpose of all the Professional Development activities continues to be the building of capacity to serve all our students more effectively through time, tools, and training.

Mental Health in the Schools—Endowment for Health Grant—The Planning Grant team of area school districts working with *Riverbend Mental Health Center*, the *Division of Children, Youth, and Families*, the *Division of Juvenile Justice*, and *Child and Family Services* has continued our work of the past year. We have now filed a Letter of Intent with the *Endowment for Health* to apply for an Implementation Grant. If the grant is awarded to our group, our model approach to interventions and services will be piloted in one or more of the school districts. Even if Hopkinton is not selected as a pilot site in this first implementation, we will benefit from the use of the newly developed protocols for agency interactions and from reflections on the pilot site experiences. Our objective is to increase student and family access to whatever supports for mental health are needed.

Alternate Assessment Task Force—For the past two years I have continued to work with the NHDOE Alternate Assessment Task Force to redesign the annual assessment of students with the most significant disabilities to bring the process into compliance with federal guidelines. The current assessment requires many hours of work by special educators over the course of the year to complete an extensive portfolio of data and supporting evidence. Questions remain, however, about the validity of the assessment in actually measuring the progress of students.

It has indeed been a very busy year thus far, full of challenges and accomplishments. As a Student Services staff, we have continued to be creative in our efforts to meet the needs of all students in the most effective and responsible ways possible in our own schools.