

RSU9 Office of Special Services Board Update Oct. 25, 2022

Director John S. Jones

The 2022-2032 got off to a very busy start and suddenly here we are.... close to the end of the first quarter! Of particular interest to mention here is that we have made significant progress with hiring and supporting both our new and veteran special services staff and there are a number of exciting developments going on in buildings and classrooms across the district. Nevertheless, various challenges will likely remain with us for some time that we shall indeed work through at the district, building, classroom and student levels.

It is important for me to thank our entire staff of general and special educators as well as all of our support staff, related service providers, central office staff and community partners in helping to maintain and sustain services for students with disabilities. Working together we have navigated the changing and challenging landscapes before us due to a pandemic and all that remains in its wake.

Staffing

During the summer of 2022 and through September and October our office has interviewed upwards of 50 applicants for various positions throughout the district. Whether it be due to family moves, other work opportunities or reasons unique to an employee's circumstances to include economic considerations, the labor force has remained a challenge both here and throughout Maine across many sectors. However, while many districts continue to struggle to fill positions, RSU9 has attracted a number of great candidates and many have made significant commitments despite less than traditional career pathways.

Some numbers:

Position Vacancies	6/30/2021	7/1/2022	Today
K-5 teachers	7	2	1
6-8 teachers	3	0	0
9-12 teachers	3	2	2
School Psychologists	1	1	1 (contracted)
Speech Pathologists	1	1	0 (contracted)
Social Workers	1	1	0
BCBA	1	1	0

Please note that we do contract with an outside agency for school psychologist work yet continue to seek another school psychologist for our district. We also have a sizable contract with Presence Learning (online platform) to address speech and language needs across the district.

Educational Technicians

On 7/12/2022 there were 33 Educational Technician positions open. I am pleased to report that at this time there are 8 Ed Tech positions and one telepractice support position open. We have recently interviewed 3 applicants who are still completing the hiring process.

It should be noted that recently one of our ed techs in the HS has been hired as a Grade 4 teacher, so best wishes on her new position at AHS!

Facts and Figures Updates of Note

Currently identified students with disabilities in RSU9 = 388 with 26 students are currently in the referral process to determine eligibility (presence of a disability + adverse impact upon educational performance + need for special education services).

It is important to note that while we have had 32 students move out of RSU9 that 46 have moved into RSU9. Of this latter number, approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ of these students have significant educational and/or mental health needs requiring increasing adult support along with expanded services such as specialized transportation, out of district placements, related services, health and/or behavior plans, and so on. This has been the trend in the past few years along with an increase of students with Autism, particularly at the younger grade levels.

Enrollment projections in July for the October 2022 Child Count were approximating 430 yet at this time the movement out of 32 students over the course of the current school year (Aug - Oct) coupled with the current referral process of 26 and the influx of 46 students may result in an April count somewhat lower than expected yet referrals typically trend upward during the spring months.

Currently, 13 students are receiving special education services in out of district placements such as special purpose private schools.

MDOE monitoring

We are actively working on our district's Corrective Action Plan as part of the Federal general monitoring system. Professional Development activities are planned for the year to address any less than 100% level compliant areas as identified by MDOE.

Professional Growth and Development Opportunity highlights:

I am very excited to say that the Office of Special Services had completed four days of training in August to support our newer teachers and also veteran educators as well. This was provided both in house and through MDOE/MADSEC sponsored activities. Some other highlights of late include:

Mentoring and targeted coaching = Continues with our coordinators, directors and contracted consultants. All new teachers are connected with seasoned professionals to support them through the early stages of professional growth.

Specialized Literacy Instruction = Teachers have been provided with SPIRE training and most recently, LIPS training (a Lindamood-Bell sponsored program focusing on phonemic awareness and sound-symbol mapping). This provides our teachers with evidence based approaches to address lagging literacy skills.

EMMC Learning Facilitator Program = A MDOE and MCCS Workforce Development Program supporting Ed Tech professional development. We currently have 4 ed techs enrolled. This helps to increase their skills and certification level.

Safety Care training = Has been provided and will continue throughout the school year to insure our staff respond effectively and least restrictively to challenging behaviors.

UMF collaborations = The Office of Special Services continues to access and work with staff at UMF regarding instruction, inclusion and best practices. Thanks to UMF instructors Kate MacLeod, Brianna Grumpstrup and Jessica Apgar for their support of our teachers and programs. Also, special thanks to UMF Counseling Program Director Lisa Henry for her ongoing support of our Day Treatment program social workers. Our office plans to continue to broaden and strengthen our collaborations with UMF in both the short and long term.

LAWS = Ongoing guidance and training being provided throughout the school year to address identified professional development needs related to our MDOE monitoring plan.

Statewide Presentation by RSU9 Staff!!

I am also very excited to inform you that last year at MBHS we began piloting a social skills training group modeled after the PEERS Curriculum (Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills) developed by UCLA. RSU9's Speech and Language Therapists Victoria Petersen and Liv Gleode along with High School Social Worker Anna Peterson will be presenting their case study on this pilot program at the Annual Fall MADSEC Conference in Portland in two sessions. This is a great opportunity not only to showcase the great work happening here in RSU9 but also to share our discoveries with others. You can find their presentation slides here: [📄 PEERS Pilot Program RSU 9 2022](#)

Career Explorations!

Last year via a collaboration with MBHS Principal Monique Poulin a new 3 period course was developed, Career Explorations, which was established this fall by a Special Education Teacher and Dept. Co-Chair Shane Dudash and District Coordinator Mike Hanson. This fall our students have been, and will be, visiting worksites around the county to include Origin, Sugarloaf, Riverside Florists, Gagne and Son Concrete and others. The class most recently attended the Bangor Career Fair to get a sense of all the vocational opportunities that they can begin dreaming about. We are very excited about this course and hope that it will lead to some level of paid employment experiences and extended learning opportunities.

Moving forward : The Office of Special Services will continue to collaborate with statewide and community partners in the following ways that the board may help with:

- Establish Unified Basketball at MBHS (we have had our first planning meeting)
- Continue to develop inclusionary practices and approaches to student experiences both in and out of the classroom.
- Complete our MDOE monitoring process in June of 2023
- Update our Restraint and Seclusion policy
- Increase student engagement in IEP development
- Strengthen Transition Planning procedures and activities
- Facilitate supplemental instructional services and opportunities via our ESSER grant
- Celebrate and recognize the great work being done by our staff
- Support ongoing Professional Growth and Development activities
- Expand the PEERS model to MBMS.

Thank you for your ongoing support of students with disabilities in RSU 9!