

# RSU9 Office of Special Services July, 2023 Board Report

## Our office staff:

- **Director:** John S. Jones
- **Assistant Director:** Cynthia Bernstein
- **School Psychologist:** Christine Gatto-Shea
- **Special Service Coordinators:** Cheryl Webster ( PreK-6), Mike Hanson ( 7-Adult )
- **BCBA:** In Hiring process
- **Administrative Assistant:** BJ Tracy

## Introduction:

While our Office of Special Services reflects upon the completion of another year of challenging yet successful programming for students with disabilities here in RSU9, we have transitioned into full planning mode for the upcoming 23-24 school year and into the fourth week of Extended School Year services ( aka, summer school). First and foremost I do want to thank all of our RSU9 staff for working hard to make sure that where students have demonstrated lagging academic, social or functional skills, they have shown marked improvement and made progress towards more developmentally appropriate and grade and age level expected performance. Kudos to all of our building administrators, general education teachers and related service providers ( SLP, OT, SW, BCBA ) for ensuring access to the general education curriculum and to all the experiences enjoyed by all students in RSU9. In this report I have provided some highlights from the 22-23 school year and insights into what our office is working towards as we look to the upcoming 23-24 version. There is much planning that occurs during the summer months and changes that we'll need to adjust to here and there depending on factors such as student transfers, staffing changes and so forth.

## Staffing

Much like was explained in the February board report, our staffing continues to improve considerably when compared to just a couple of years ago and yet a few areas of need remain- which is typically the case each year. Hiring will continue throughout the summer months and although some key positions have been filled to date, a number of openings remain. At this time the following positions remain vacant:

- At MBHS, 1 Adaptive Skills teacher and 1 HS Day Treatment teacher and 1 Social Worker anticipated ( .5 Special Education/ .5 General Education).
- Board Certified Behavior Analyst ( In the hiring process )
- 12 Educational Technicians ( 4 in K-2 Adaptive Skills, 8 in other programs )

This has been one of the more encouraging summers in the past few years with respect to who we have already hired and are preparing for their new roles. Below is a list of

professional positions that have been filled thus far and those that remain vacant to date:

- MBHS: an experienced Adaptive Skills teacher was hired in January, and
- A Resource Room teacher will be starting this fall.
- Cushing: an experienced K-2 teacher for our expanded Adaptive Skills Program was hired and is already planning and working in ESY services.
- MBMS: the Day Treatment teacher position has been filled with a teacher Who has experience with Day Treatment services and instruction.
- Districtwide: An experienced Speech and Language Pathologist will be starting in August and a BCBA is in the hiring process. We also hired an experienced Occupational Therapist in Feb.

Positions that remain vacant include:

- 12 Educational Technician positions K-12 ( 4 in our K-2 program, 8 districtwide)
- MBHS Adaptive Skills teacher.
- MBHS Day Treatment teacher.

It is worth noting that 7 of our staff who began working in RSU9 within the past three years within the Educational Technician role, or as substitutes, were hired as full time teachers. Also, 4 Educational Technicians completed the training program at EMMC to move from an Ed Tech 1 position to an Ed Tech III designation. This was an MDOE supported effort towards developing existing staff members towards a higher level of training and expertise, stressed under the impact of the pandemic and staffing shortages statewide.

### **Special Services, by the numbers:**

Approximately 18-19% of all students in RSU 9 are students who are experiencing the impact of a disability. Currently, 401 students are identified as needing services although this number tends to change daily depending on transfers and exits. 30 students are currently in the referral process and will be participating in evaluations and/or team meetings to determine the need for special education services. At this time of year, the overall number of students with disabilities is expected to increase over the course of the coming months as we have experienced high rates of transfers within the first few months of each school year.

Some numbers of note:

- 63 students have transferred into RSU9 since early September of 2022.
- 81 students were referred to our office by parents, teachers or others for the presence of a disability requiring special education services.
- Over 900 IEP team meetings were held during the 22-23 school year.

- Of the 63 students who transferred to RSU9, 30% require highly specialized Services such as those in Adaptive Skills or Day Treatment programs.
- Of the 18 students with disabilities entering Kindergarten, half are Students with Autism who will require highly specialized programming. (We continue to receive new students from CDS. Identification rates have Increased significantly this past year)

### **New Programming at Cushing**

Our office would like to thank Principal Acedo, the Board, Supt. Elkington, Mike Turner in our operations department, and many others for their help supporting the development of expanded Adaptive Skills programming to meet the educational needs of very young children experiencing Autism and Developmental Disabilities.

Programming will be focused on developing communication, behavioral stability and emerging academic skills as unique to each individual. We have secured the classroom and therapeutic spaces at Cushing and parking and playground enhancements are well underway. At this time our office is securing Professional Development consultations from UMF and beyond in an effort to provide continuous coaching throughout the year ahead for our K-2 programming and beyond as we develop our staff's ability to respond effectively to the needs of students with Autism/Developmental Disabilities entering Kindergarten, transferring into the district or moving on from grade to grade.

### **MDOE Monitoring Cycle**

The MDOE monitoring cycle for RSU9 has been closed by the monitoring Team at MDOE! Our Corrective Action Plan has been completed and reviewed by the MDOE and while we have received this via email from MDOE, we await the final letter from the commissioner and the Office of Special Education and Inclusive Education yet I have attached the . I have linked below the most recent documents from the MDOE reflecting the area of concern identified two years ago that we have addressed via training and close monitoring of IEP transition planning which will be a focus for the year ahead at MBHS. No action is required at this time yet we shall indeed be looking closely at transition planning moving forward. This is particularly important as the service eligibility obligation has moved to age 22. The link to the RSU9 report:

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/sites/maine.gov.doe/files/bulk/determinationprofilesfy2020/R SU09.pdf>

And to our final LEA determination letter from MDOE:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nZr7-MxFEPTpNGGw-pw5ymHP9ssVhPsdTW0D8afZ354/edit?usp=sharing>