

Administrative Changes Leading School Change

The Nashoba Regional School District is realigning key staff and responsibilities in an effort to be more responsive to parents, provide a model for leadership of special education that is building based and to provide a year to reflect on the direction that leadership for special education needs to take in light of upcoming changes in the new authorization of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) by the Federal government.

The Director of Special Education, Lois Ducharme, is leaving after four years with the District. Ms. Ducharme, arriving in 1999, came after the first reauthorization of IDEA in 1997. With that new law special education in Massachusetts changed significantly and efforts to include special needs students in their community schools began. That effort, seen by many as a significant change in placement, often put the District and parents at odds at what was best for the child. Training for principals, teachers, and paraprofessionals, often was not timely so that there was a consistent message to parents and advocates about services and programs that the District was offering. Under Ms. Ducharme's leadership the District developed District wide programs that mirrored what private schools were offering and the District's out of district placements dropped dramatically. The District was also able to begin putting together a leadership structure within special education that created consistent interpretation and implementation of law and regulation across the District. While the faces have changed, having team chairs work across grade levels instead of within schools has created a synergy around common thinking about instructional strategies, program offerings, and assessments.

The success of these programs and other efforts, including professional development training, has enabled the district to begin the effort to provide more school based services in Learning Labs to meet a greater variety of special education needs. The new authorization of IDEA will require new regulations to be implemented and this will require a style of leadership that focuses on building relationships, talking with parents and staff, and working with principals to build consistency across the district.

Superintendent of Schools, Michael Wood, has asked longtime Principal, and former Director of Special Education Patricia Linenkemper to work with a team to lead this effort. Ms. Linenkemper will continue to be the Principal of the Mary Rowlandson Elementary School, but will be assisted by an Assistant Principal dedicated to supporting the school, and an Assistant Director of Special Education, dedicated to the operations and management of special education. Ms. Linenkemper's role will be primarily with parents and principals to build a deep understanding of the new rules and to oversee the smooth implementation. The Assistant Director will work with teachers, paraprofessionals and team chairs to see that daily implementation, professional development and instruction are in line with individual education plan goals and objectives.

Additionally, there will be a reorganization of student services at the high school under the leadership of one administrator who will focus on the social, emotional and academic needs of students. Long time Director of Guidance, Diane Haarmann will be retiring in January. A Dean of Student Services will be appointed for September and will work with Ms. Haarmann to begin the transition. There is an increased emphasis and need to emphasize the academic counseling role in which our counselors are involved. In order to continue this and look at the other needs of our students, the department needs to have focused leadership, meaning that there needs to be additional counselors to meet the demands. This change will free the Dean from having a specific case load, and will allow for a counselor to be hired in September. An additional counselor will be hired in January as well to fill the void left by Nancy Grohmann, who is retiring.

This is a one year plan, requires no additional funding, and works with the skills and talents of the professionals currently working within Nashoba. This year will give everyone working with our students an opportunity to learn about how to work with inclusion as a way of being, rather than something we do. This reorganization of roles allows us to learn from one another, see how the role of principal is vital to the leadership of special education for all students, and to tap into a successful role model already in place within our district. It allows us to use our resources to best meet the needs of all students at all levels of our organization.