



SOMERVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Special Education Department

167 Holland Street Suite 310
Somerville, MA 02144
Telephone: (617) 625-6600 Ext. 6800
Fax: (617) 591-7901

To: Somerville School Committee

From: Ildefonso Arellano, Director Special Education
Special Education Leadership Team

Cc: Dr. Ruben Carmona, Superintendent
Dr. Jessica Boston-Davis, Assistant Superintendent

Date: June 17, 2024

Re: Special Education Department Update

Dear School Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share SY 23-24 highlights from the Special Education Department. We hope this memo serves as a brief summary of the key focus areas that have framed our work this school year.

In my first year as the Special Education Director, my priorities have been to:

- cultivate trusting and collaborative working relationships with stakeholders in order to gain a deeper understanding of the Somerville Public Schools,
- establish an understanding of the program and procedures in place within the special education department and how those program and procedures can be strengthened and enhanced to support the work of the department, and
- Identify immediate priorities and determine areas of focus for long-term goals.

I am incredibly proud of the great work the Special Education Department has done this school year. Our work with district and school leaders has focused on fostering an asset-based approach and shared responsibility to promote equitable access for all of our special education students in Somerville.

OUR MISSION AND VISION

The Special Education Department is responsible for ensuring all students who require special education services, in order to maximize their learning, are identified and their individualized learning needs are met in the least restrictive environment.

Special Education Department staff work with teachers, administrators, and families to ensure Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students are implemented with integrity.

The vision of the Special Education Department is to meet the individual needs of all students and provide a pathway to lifelong learning.

OVERVIEW

OUR STUDENTS		
	Number of Special Education Students	Percentage of Special Education Students
District	1028	17.1
Capuano	112	43.2
Argenziano	83	14.8
Brown	25	11.3
East	98	13.1
Healey	97	19.1
Kennedy	94	21.1
West	66	17.1
Winter Hill	100	24.7
SHS	191	17.3
Next Wave/Full Circle	64	77.1
OOD	58	-
Walk-Ins	27	-

STAFFING

132 Unit A Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Resource Room Special Education Teachers, ● Substantially Separate Special Education Teachers ● Speech/Language Pathologists (SLPs) ● Board Certified Behavioral Analysts (BCBAs) ● School Adjustment Counselors (SACs) ● IEP Team Leaders (ITLs)
79 Paraprofessionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Includes 184 and 208 Day Paraprofessional Staff
13 Nonunion Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Occupational Therapists

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreters • Translators
4 Clerical Staff	
10 SAA Administrators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assistant Directors • Special Education Department Coordinators
Contracted Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orientation and Mobility • Teacher of Student with Visual Impairments • Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPPORTS AND SERVICES AT ALL SCHOOLS		
Resource Room / Inclusion Support	Speech/Language Therapy	Occupational Therapy
Physical Therapy	BCBA Support	Counseling
Adaptive Physical Education	Orientation and Mobility	Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments
Teacher of Students who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing	Assistive Technology/Augmentative Alternative Communication	

SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS			
School	Program	Grade Level	Primary Disability
Capuano	-ECIP Sub-Separate and Integrated -AIM (Adapt, Include and Motivate)	-PreK -PreK and K	-Developmental Delays -Autism
WHCS	AIM (Adapt, Include and Motive)	1-8	-Autism
Healey	Multi-Graded	2-5	-Variety
East	Multi Graded	8	-Variety
Kennedy	-Life Skills -SKIP (Specialized Kenedy Intensive Program) -SEEK (Social and Educational Enrichment at Kennedy)	-K-8 -K-8 -2-6	-II, Neurological -Multiple Disabilities -Emotional
Argenziano	Language-Based/Learning Disabilities	4-6	-SLD
SHS	-Life Skills -SHIP (Specialized High School Intensive Program)	-9-12 -9-12 -9-12	-II, Neurological -Multiple Disabilities

	-Path Program -Transition Program	-Ages 18-22	-Emotional -Variety
SHS	-Next Wave -Full Circle	-6-8 -9-12	-Emotional -Emotional

KEY FOCUS AREAS

NEW INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAM (IEP)

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) recently made updates to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) form. These changes are intended to strengthen the IEP process and improve the educational outcomes and experiences of students with disabilities in the Commonwealth. Somerville Public Schools will begin using the new form in the Fall of 2024.

Over the course of the school year, the Special Education Department has been providing training to all teaching staff, administrators, and families on the new IEP form. Training for all staff was held on professionals development days. The department held three training sessions for families: March 19, 2024, April 24, 2024 and May 16, 2024.

The Special Education Department will continue to hold trainings over the summer in order to ensure that staff and families have the appropriate understanding of the new IEP and its changes.

TIERED FOCUS MONITORING

Districts throughout the Commonwealth are reviewed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Office of Public School Monitoring every three years through Tiered Focus Monitoring. This review process emphasizes elements most tied to student outcomes.

Somerville Public Schools submitted documentation as part of the review which focused on the following standards:

- Licensure and professional development
- Parent/student/community engagement
- Facilities and classroom observations
- Oversight
- Time and learning
- Equal access

Universal Standards and Targeted Standards are aligned with the following regulations:

- Special Education (SE)
 - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA-2004);
 - Federal regulations promulgated under that Act at 34 CFR Part 300; M.G.L. c. 71B, and
 - Massachusetts Board of Education's Special Education regulations (603 CMR 28.00), as amended effective March 1, 2007.
- Civil Rights Methods of Administration and Other General Education Requirements (CR)
 - Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;
 - Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974
 - Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990

On May 31, 2024, the district was provided with a Draft Report from the Office of Public School Monitoring in order to comment on the factual accuracy of the Department's findings, if any. A final report will be provided to the district soon after. Upon review of the draft report, no specific findings were noted under the Special Education (SE) standards.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING

Language-Based Learning Disabilities Program (LBLD): The Language-Based Learning Disabilities program at Argenziano was opened this school year. The program provides intensive support and services for students with a primary disability of Specific Learning Disability. Students in the program benefit from a combination of small group specialized instruction and inclusion in the general education setting. The Special Education Department contracted with Landmark School Outreach to provide professional development to both special education and general education staff in the program. Landmark School Outreach is a leader in the field of serving students with language-based learning disabilities. Their mission is to empower students with language-based learning disabilities (LBLD) by offering educators meaningful and effective professional development grounded in theory and practice. They provide the bridge that links teachers with the evidence-based practices such as science of reading and structured literacy that improve student outcomes.

Learning Ally: Learning Ally was purchased for each school building and introduced to the special education staff this school year. Learning Ally is an online library of audiobooks and textbooks, to meet the needs of struggling readers. Learning Ally's approach is driven by the science of reaching (word recognition and language comprehension). Their methodology ensures that educators can effectively customize instruction to change achievement trajectories according to the needs of their students. Special education teachers can add students to the platform and download books onto the student's personalized bookshelf. This program can be accessed with or without internet both at school and at home.

I would like to thank the School Committee for their continued commitment in supporting and advocating for the needs of our special education students in Somerville Public Schools

Sincerely,



Ildefonso Arellano
Director of Special Education