

Mesa Special Education Alliance / District Q & A Meeting

April 26, 2023



Attendees

- MSEA Parent Representatives:
Nancy Martinez, Vikki Johnson,
Nicole Kurth
- District representatives:
Holly Williams, Theresa Baca,
Cameo Kirby

Community Questions/Concerns

1. We asked to learn more and engage in discussion about the Inclusion Task Force.

Ms. Baca shared the following:

- It is in its infancy
- 11 people on Task Force
- MSEA asked whether the focus included other things in addition to academics. Ms. Baca said they will take a comprehensive approach - academics and extra-curricular.
- Includes Teaching & Learning, Mike Garcia, Special Education, school psychologists, 3 special education area directors
- MSEA asked about the sources of baseline data to assess inclusion. (Will parental input be considered?) Ms. Baca said some data may be pulled from CNA (Comprehensive Needs Assessment) surveys and this may help with data points.
- Ms. Baca said most self-contained students are in general education PE
- This will be a standing agenda item in our future meetings with District

Community Questions/Concerns

2. What are the District's future plans to make playgrounds accessible for students who use wheelchairs and/or have mobility challenges?

Ms. Baca reported:

- "Most playgrounds are accessible."
- Schools with SID (Severe Intellectual Disability) Programs have accessible playgrounds:
 Lowell & Franklin East
- Other schools have purchased roll out mats (as needed) for specific students / playgrounds
- Baca said these roll-out mats could "follow" the student from campus to campus

Community Questions/Concerns

3. How can we partner with the District to help raise awareness on the importance of providing opportunities for all students to be able to attend their prom? (i.e., for those with photosensitive epilepsy and other sensory sensitivities.) Mountain View High did a great job of this in 2022, however, other high school students who have photosensitive epilepsy have been unable to attend their prom.

Ms. Baca's response:

- Parents should bring concerns to their Case Manager to provide supports and accommodations, as needed.
- Not "a known issue at the district level." Ms. Baca cited low prevalence rate of photosensitivity epilepsy.
- Ms. Baca asked us to forward the video The Epilepsy Foundation shared with us. We sent it 4/27/23. Link to video:

<https://protect-usb.mimecast.com/s/Oj5yCQArvVSy6G2cxyayG?domain=underthelightsfilm.com3>

Community Questions/Concerns

3. Cont.

MSEA follow-up email sent May 9th:

“Where on the IEP would the prom goals and the evacuation plans be?”

Ms. Baca’s response:

“For students that would require special accommodations for extra curricular activities goals would be written as part of their IEP. It could also be a supplemental aid or service. So using the example of strobe lights we discussed at the meeting the IEP team could note in the medical section of the IEP that the student requires accommodations to participate in certain events like dances and assemblies where strobe lights may be used. The team would also document these proposals in the PWN. For evacuation plans the OT would document the mobility needs and indicate specifics of the evacuation plan/information throughout the IEP. It would be in present levels of performance, possibly in the medical section and supplemental aids (in the case the student would need the support of an adult to evacuate). Everything should always be summarized in the PWN. ”

Community Questions/Concerns

3. Cont.

“A quality IEP should tell a story of the child's strengths and the supports needed to ensure progress towards goals (and of course safety when access and mobility are impacted. The PWN is so important because it will document that full consideration has been given to any input or information (proposals) any member of the team provided regarding the child's educational needs, and clarifies that a decision was made by the team.”

Community Questions/Concerns

4. At the Board meeting on 3/28, Board President Hutchinson requested information regarding the number of students that have “graduated” from their IEP. Can you provide numbers for pre-Covid (2019) and YTD this year?

Ms. Baca provided the following data:

- 637 students were exited from their IEP this school year
- Prior to COVID we had 591 students exited from their IEP's

Community Questions/Concerns

5. Our parent community reported bullying of students with disabilities at Lindbergh Elementary. What is being done to include training for staff and also students?

Ms. Baca shared an email response from Lindbergh Principal Erik Hedrick:

Hi Theresa,

There have been no recent complaints related to bullying of students with disabilities. Thank you for letting me know, and giving us the opportunity to communicate how we handle these situations when they come up. We take bullying seriously especially when it involves our special needs population.

Currently, we have two measures in place to help support students, both Gen Ed and SpEd

Morning Meetings - these are opportunities for students to build community while learning coping skills to combat bullying. We have learned that our master schedule has made it hard for all classrooms to have this, however we have created space for this on our 23-24 master schedule so teachers have the time.

Resources - These are available to staff shared in weekly updates and during staff meetings. Springtime in school can see a flare up of bullying behaviors so we try to utilize these resources along with videos and other school counseling activities to help students understand expectations.

Thank you,
Erik

Community Questions/Concerns

6. Our parent community reported guidelines regarding the use of the seclusion room at Adams Elementary are not being followed. I.e., not following a trauma-informed approach; not maintaining continuous visual monitoring of student; failing to notify parent/guardian on the same day of incident; room having cement flooring, etc. Please provide details on how the District and school personnel are trained on requirements outlined in section (D)(1)-(2) of A.R.S. § 15-105.

Response from Adams Elementary Principal Stephanie Montez:

Our LASER staff are all trained in de-escalation strategies and use those approaches when a student needs to go to the isolation room. There are always multiple staff with a student who is in there supporting either by helping the child to regulate or taking notes that go into the paperwork that always go hand in hand with the use of seclusion. The room is in our portables so it is NOT concrete and is carpeted. When staff need to take students there, they radio admin or the office so we are aware and we also come when support is needed or if it is a student that is having repeated issues. Our social worker is almost always involved as well. Please feel free to call me if I didn't address anything.

Community Questions/Concerns

6. Cont.

Aspen - replaced CPI in MPS

Seclusion Rooms exist at:

- Jordan
- SHARP
- Porter
- Adams
- Lindbergh
- Taft

Community Questions/Concerns

7. Our community would like to know MPS' plans for Deaf education. Mesa used to have a strong program. What were the number of deaf and hard of hearing students from 2015 to current school year? What are the numbers of certified deaf education teachers from 2015 to current school year?

Ms. Baca provided the following data:

Hearing Impaired Students (Primary Eligibility ONLY)

2015-2016

Students 91

2016-2017

Students 90

2017-2018

Student 85

2018-2019

Student 87

2019-2020

Students 98

2020-2021

Students 105

2021-2022

Students 105

2022-2023

Students 91

Community Questions/Concerns

7. Cont.

- FM systems are still present in classrooms - HI Teachers support by frontloading training for school teachers based on IEP accommodations
- HI students participate in gen ed with supports (including Audiologist, 4 Itinerant Teachers)
- Some students are in self contained programs:
 - 12 - Elementary School - O'Connor (80%). All use ASL.
 - 8 - Junior High - Poston
 - ? - High School - Mountain View
- MSEA asked how families can learn more about services and programs for deaf. District responded if someone is interested in attending MPS from another district / charter they should go to their home school and speak with the school psychologist and the district will support with placement once the IEP is received

Community Questions/Concerns

7. Cont.

MSEA follow-up email sent May 9th:

“We failed to get the number of certified Deaf teachers in the district. Do you have that number (and could you provide the schools they are at)?”

Ms. Baca’s response:

“We have four teachers. One at O'Connor, one at MVHS and 2 itinerants that travel across the district supporting students. We have one vacant position.”

Community Questions/Concerns

8. How many campuses have emergency evacuation chairs for students with access and functional needs during an emergency?

Ms. Baca's response:

- Physical Therapists' role is to support writing evacuation plans for students
- In addition to students with physical mobility challenges, students with sensory needs could have one as well
- "All students that require evacuation plans have them." (*Note: see follow-up response noted in slides 6-7*)
- Staff training is required for those campuses with Stryker chairs; Mesa High has one chair due to an inoperable elevator

Community Questions/Concerns

9. How is MPS attracting more employees to Instructional Aide positions?

Ms. Baca's response:

- Job Fairs; posting on Linked In / Indeed - couple dozen of applicants that way
- Salaries were increased this school year - less attrition due to that change
- Self contained IA's hours increased from 29 - 32 hours (including benefits)
- This issue is definitely one of MPS' top 3 priorities
- Our pay rates are competitive compared to surrounding districts

Community Questions/Concerns

10. Are teachers and/or aides trained to help students use their AAC device? (Versus only giving students access during speech therapy)

Ms. Baca's response:

- Assistive Technology supports AAC devices as well as sped teachers and SLP's
- 3 total staff members in AT
- SLP's train teachers; via inclusion models
- Students have devices checked out to them each school year
- MPS spent \$300,000 on devices

Community Questions/Concerns

11. As a follow-up to the Board meeting on 3/28, does the new campus meet the EDP requirements for the Jordan students that are being moved?

Ms. Baca's response:

- Campus meets EDP requirements
- \$1 million is being spent on campus upgrades. Lobby upgrade; fencing is being changed to 8 feet. Additional cameras are being added. Library remodel.
- SRO will be on campus full time
- Many staff members will be solely based on campus and not split between additional campuses

Community Questions/Concerns

12. What are the District's plans to expand Adaptive PE across all campuses? Parents report fantastic coaches and students at Dobson.

Ms. Baca's response:

- There are 17 adaptive PE coaches across District.
- Adaptive PE supports students who cannot fully participate in general education PE
- Note: We believe the parent who submitted this question may have been referring to "Unified PE."
- Some campuses do have *Unified PE* (Skyline & Red Mountain)
- Unified PE is every day of the week. All activities/sports are modified to meet the needs of students with disabilities with general education peers supporting them
- Unified Sports outside of school are at most Junior High's & High School's
- MPS has a partnership with City of Mesa Adaptive Sports

Community Ideas Shared with District

Idea

- Allow parents to volunteer or participate meaningfully instead of only allowing "30 minutes of admin supervised *observation.*"
- Consider providing a summer program for pre-school age children (3+). Our children thrive on structure and sadly we have no summer programs for our kids.

District response

- Since COVID ended things are slowly getting back to normal
- PreCOVID these were opportunities offered in City of Mesa; however these haven't quite returned to MPS just yet
- Ms. Baca reached out to the City of Mesa (no response by our meeting time). We will have more info on this next meeting.

Community Ideas Shared with District

Idea

- Please consider purchasing Geodes to align with Wilson for every school.
- Offer incentivized paid training for all SLP's and SLPA's in Lindamood Bell programs, particularly LIP's.

District response

- Every elementary school has Geodes now; they may not be in use just yet, but will be.
- SPIRE is what we are using right now and many staff members are trained in this program

Community Ideas Shared with District

Idea

- Invite inspiring guest speakers who have disabilities to speak to school assemblies at MPS campuses.

District response

- Ms. Williams stated in the past there were challenges because not all parents wanted their students to be present for certain speakers. She noted they are opposed to doing “whole school assemblies” because they cut into instructional time.

Community Ideas Shared with District

Idea

- MPS' Special Education page has many links that don't work: The link to the ADE's Parent Survey is outdated, and says the survey is closed (It doesn't close until 5/31/23.) Many parents have stated they do not receive an email or paper invitation with their code to take the survey. Can you add something to the website so parents know who to contact to receive their code to take the survey? None of the "Parent and Community Engagement" links on the MPS Special Education work.

District response

- The link has been fixed.
- If you did not receive the link/code to take the ADE survey, contact Justin Ashley's office: jaashley@mpsaz.org
- Sometimes emails are sent to junk inboxes. The district is able to track what email the surveys were sent to and when

Community Ideas Shared with District

Idea

- On the Special Education Org Chart on MPS' website, can you add hyperlinks for emails so parents know how to contact staff?

District response

- We can look at adding those
- District SPED site is going to be updated to the new format soon

Community Ideas Shared with District

Idea

- United Sound's mission is to remove barriers and foster social change through music. Gilbert Public Schools has offered inclusive music experiences for their students for many years, and MPS has lost parents who have moved their kids to Gilbert for this program. When will MPS offer this?

District response

- Band teacher from Poston Jr High reached out to District about offering United Sound. They will be the first school to offer United Sound next year.

Community Ideas Shared with District

Idea

- Please consider delivering another Special Education update (possibly as a Facebook Live Event) as the audio from the March 28th Governing Board Meeting failed, and our large community was unable to hear this important update on You Tube.

District response

- Ms. Baca will record another update and it will be posted for the public to view. She anticipates it will go out in early June, after graduation.

Additional Follow-Up

MSEA follow-up email sent May 9th:

“We discussed in the past the district helping to get information out regarding the MSEA. Can you let us know if the information has been posted on the department website and shared with the principals for their newsletters?”

Ms. Baca’s response:

“We are in the process of our website being updated. We are slated to begin the process with our district team by the end of May. Once the redesign is created the information will be a part of the special education department page. I will send an update for principals this week on the information you provided earlier.



**Thoughts,
concerns,
questions or
ideas?**

**Contact
mesapedalliance
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**Next meeting:
September 2023**

