

Chebeague Island School Committee Workshop Minutes

November 17, 2015

Call to Order

The workshop was called to order at 6:30 pm by Chairperson Beverly Johnson. Present: School Committee members Beverly Johnson, Jeff Putnam, Carol White, Suzanne Rugh, and Jennifer Belesca; school staff Superintendent/Principal Michael Pulsifer, OT/Counselor Denise Sullivan and Pre-K teacher Nancy Earnest, and guests Yvonne Thomas from the Island Institute, Geoff Summa, and Chebeague Parents Association members Meredith Beaupre, Lisa Tucker, Amy Rich, Betts Mayer, Erika Neumann, Eliza Jane Adams, and Denise Bonville.

Yvonne Thomas from the Island Institute was in attendance to offer support and guidance to the Chebeague Parents Association (CPA) as they prepare to offer supportive workshops for parents and island residents that will be given in a series this year. The topic for tonight's workshop was "What Works in Island School Counseling - A Look at Community Partnerships That Address Wellness and Mental Health in Island Communities." Yvonne noted that she spent many years working as a guidance counselor for island schools (North Haven, Vinalhaven, and Matinicus). She is currently the Director of Education for the Island Institute in Rockland, Maine and she works to support islands in their efforts of educating students and community members.

Discussion Overview

Topic 1 - Best Practices and Trends: School counseling on an island can be much different than it is at a mainland school. All members of an island school team wear many hats, and serve many roles. This is true for island communities as well. Everyone needs to be comprehensive in their approach, and it can be difficult. Confidentiality is needed, and working as a team is also a key component for a successful counseling program. CIS counselor Denise Sullivan did an overview of her "normal" day, which can be far from routine; including student issues, classroom presentations, small group and individual work, IEP meetings, parent meetings, referrals and she can be a resource on many occasions in areas outside of counseling. Denise reported that the staff at CIS is great, and there is a good foundation of trust among the students, staff and parents.

Topic 2 - Chebeague's Assets: It was noted that CI has many assets, and some of them mentioned were as follows: a great CIS staff, a low counselor to student ratio, strong community support and involvement, like the CPA. It was suggested that a newsletter could be sent home from different school staff, and that might help inform parents of the many things going on at CIS and who the varied staff members are and what they teach.

Topic 3 - Counseling and Community Resources In Place: Similar to topic 2, Chebeague Island has many on island resources and assets to lend a hand in educating our students and in supporting our community during trying times.

Topic 4 - Opportunities for the Future: A working Crisis Plan would be a good place to start. The school must have one as per state policy, and it was suggested to have a positive link between the school and the community for the Crisis Plan. It was also suggested to work with community resources (CPA, Fire/Rescue, local counselors, church) and with state and national organizations when building a Crisis Plan. Touching base with Yarmouth and Cumberland was also suggested as a positive link during the Crisis Plan development.

Topic 5 - Next Steps: The goal is to offer CPA sponsored community workshops. The CPA would like to recognize one theme per year, and support the island community by offering workshops to educate and inform residents on that theme. So far the CPA has planned the following workshops: Grief and Loss, Mental Health First Aid, Suicide Awareness and Prevention, and Talking with Teens About Important Issues. It was suggested that inviting other islands to the workshops might be a possible idea. The first workshop sponsored by the CPA will be on Sunday, January 31, 2016 and it will be co-hosted by the CPA and Sandy Lovell from the Center for Grieving Children. The topic will be for the workshop will be "Supporting Our Children Through Grief and Loss." More information will follow on this event from the CPA.

Those present noted that the workshop was a positive meeting, and a beneficial step on many levels. Thank you's were offered all around.

Adjournment

The workshop was adjourned at 7:45 pm.