

Education Questions for Ellen Sugita	Category/Topic
<p>1.If a child is on an IEP and subsequently evaluated to be found ineligible, what is the process to be referred for 504 accommodations?</p> <p><i>Response: The process is to contact the counselor in your school building. The counselor will schedule a meeting to determine 504 eligibility.</i></p>	IEP Process
<p>2. Who reads IEP responses/rejection letters?</p> <p><i>Response: Evaluation Team Supervisors and liaisons read and review IEP responses/rejection letters.</i></p>	IEP Process
<p>3. How are reports submitted by parents distributed to all school team members?</p> <p><i>Response: These reports are distributed to team members by the Evaluation Team Supervisor.</i></p>	IEP Process
<p>4. Summaries of the school evaluations must be available to parents at least 2 days prior to a team meeting. Does the district automatically provide these reports 2 days prior or does the parent specifically have to ask for the reports? If a parent requests the reports be made available 2 days prior to a team meeting, how are the reports given to parents so they are received 2 days prior?</p> <p><i>Response: A parent does have to request evaluations if they would like to receive them at least two days prior to a Team meeting. However, many of our schools send them out to parents at least two days prior to Team meetings on a regular basis. Evaluations can be sent via mail, or the parent can pick them up at the school. Sometimes it is put in a younger student's backpack with parent consent.</i></p>	IEP Process
<p>5. The district is very focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. What do you think is necessary to improve inclusion opportunities for children with special needs? Do we have the right resources and supports in place to make inclusion successful?</p> <p><i>Response: A district-wide philosophy of inclusion will help set the tone and shift mindsets around expectations for inclusion. The Community Input Teams, which are an outgrowth of the DEI focus and strategic planning, will provide an opportunity to begin this work. Inclusion is a broad topic that requires building capacity and communication amongst educators, both general education and special education. The FY 2020 LPS Budget includes funding for an inclusion specialist to assist teachers in providing meaningful opportunities for inclusion.</i></p>	Inclusion

<p><i>We have many resources in place to make inclusion successful. First and foremost, educators need the time to work together, so it is important for school (building) schedules to build in time to accommodate regular, dedicated time for collaboration and professional learning.</i></p>	
<p>6. How do settlement agreements benefit the student?</p> <p><i>Response: Ideally, the district and the family will agree on what most benefits the students. With finite resources and the moral imperative to ensure that children are educated in their Least Restrictive Environment, there are times when it may make sense to work through the Bureau of Special Education Appeals to reach a settlement agreement. Settlement agreements are often developed when the district and parents disagree on services and/or placement of a student. When the parents/caregivers and the district are at an impasse, the mediation process can be beneficial in that it helps finalize a disagreement and allows both parties to move forward in the best interests of the child.</i></p>	Litigation Process
<p>7. When there is a settlement agreement is the school committee or superintendent made aware of this?</p> <p><i>Response: Not usually; however, the Superintendent and School Committee are aware of significant cases that may result in settlements.</i></p>	Litigation Process
<p>8. When there is a nondisclosure agreement is the school committee or superintendent made aware of this?</p> <p><i>Response: See above. Non-disclosure agreements are standard practice in a settlement agreements.</i></p>	Litigation Process
<p>9. What is the purpose of nondisclosures?</p> <p><i>Response: NDAs ensure the privacy of both parties.</i></p>	Litigation Process
<p>10. We have a lot of wonderful staff at LPS. We also have some that are not worth retaining. This can be difficult for an administrator to admit or think about, but ignoring the issue doesn't help the many families struggling and having difficulty.</p> <p>As of right now, there is no way to raise a staff problem without risking retaliation to the child, and damaging the relationship between family and staff. The IEP meeting surveys are about the meeting only, and not the quality of services and implementation.</p> <p>In most industries, feedback from customers drives performance reviews. This is how they help their employees learn and improve. There is currently no vehicle for similar input at LPS, and this is a particular issue for parents of children with special needs.</p>	Opportunities for feedback

All of this ties into the equity issues recently raised regarding children with special needs, and the fear that parents have in reporting staff that are not treating the children equitably.

a) Would you be willing to collect annual, anonymous, feedback on individual staff members from all SPED parents and incorporating that into staff reviews?

b) Would you be willing to create a way for families to anonymously give information for any issue at any time?

If not, then why? What else will you put in place to protect parents and children? There is an evaluation process of staff that is adhered to across the district.

Response: We have approximately 1,740 staff members in the Lexington Public Schools. Like any organization, there are many outstanding employees, employees who may need significant improvement, and those who may fall somewhere in between. We have a robust evaluation system that includes ongoing observations and feedback, including mid-year, formative, and summative reviews. Personnel matters are private and should never be publicly disclosed, which often leads to assumptions by members of the public that no work is being done to help an employee improve or encouraged to explore other opportunities if there is a performance issue. The Superintendent reviews the observations and evaluations of principals and central office administrators and factors their feedback into her evaluations of them. She also reviews personnel matters, as the Director of Special Education does with her staff. If a parent has an issue with a staff member and discussions with the staff member have not resolved concerns, he/she should contact the building principal, who will look into the matter. At this time there is no formal process for anonymous feedback for staff members, but parents and caregivers often reach out to the administration, including the Superintendent, to voice their concerns.

11. Why haven't you repeated the 2012 survey or the 2013 transition survey?

Response: It was our understanding that SEPAC may be waiting for one of its members to initiate the survey process. We also are in the process of the Equity Audit that will include focus groups, comprising parents and caregivers of students with disabilities. After SEPAC and parents of students with disabilities have an opportunity to weigh in through the Equity Audit process, it would be helpful to know if you feel the EA process might reasonably take the place of any redo of the 2012 and 2013 surveys.

Opportunities for feedback

<p>12. For Both Ellen & Val: Are there plans to do another SPED survey like was done in 2012?</p> <p><i>Response: See above.</i></p>	<p>Opportunities for feedback</p>
<p>13. Why, when children are placed out of their geo-coded school and sent to a different Lexington elementary school to receive services (like TLP) are they not given the choice to remain in that school if they "graduate" from the program before they graduate from 5th grade? The policy now requires that they are automatically returned to their geo-coded school and their parents must then request permission to have the child remain in the school where they were placed for the SPED program. It seems wrong that we ask these families to jump through hoops they shouldn't have to and it doesn't help that this adds to the anxiety profile of these children and families, a condition that often times can be part of what landed them in TLP in the first place. (And please don't say it has to do with enrollment balancing because a) there are never more than 2 or 3 children a year that face this situation and b) we grandfather in school placement for non-SPED kids who we move from their geo-coded schools (e.g., buffer-zone families new to Lexington. They never have to worry about a school disruption so why should our SPED kids?</p> <p><i>Response: This process was established by the former Superintendent and any change to the process would be at that level. *Note from Dr. Hackett: If there is a way for us to minimize transitions for children who exit certain special education programs, we will do so. Ellen and I will consult and explore this option. More to come on this in the future.</i></p>	<p>Program question</p>
<p>14. Over and over we've heard that the TLP programs at Bridge and Estabrook are the same. They are not. They differ in a few key ways not the least of which is a TLP-lite at Estabrook which constitutes a best practice. I am 100% sure there is no such thing at Bridge. I support Principal autonomy up to a point but with two TLP programs co-existing here in Lexington, wouldn't we be wise to make sure best practices are shared, considered and implemented? (And to Dr. Hackett as an aside: The sharing of best practices between all of the elementary schools in general doesn't happen and this seems like such a sadly missed opportunity. Our family has two children in two different elementary schools due to a SPED program placement and I can personally attest to the fact that there are some FANTASTIC things happening at one school that is an island, unfortunately, of excellence because it's not shared with the other schools. The differences are so real that I often tell people it's like we live in two different towns).</p> <p><i>Response: Consistency between and among schools is an issue in every district. Educational leaders, like all human beings, often have</i></p>	<p>Program Question and Dr. Hackett note included</p>

strengths, interests, and passions in different areas. As a means of sharing best practices among educational leaders, we made a change to our monthly LPS Admin. Council meetings this year. Once a month we have a meeting at central office, followed by one that is hosted by a building principal. At our building-based meetings, principals share their best practices. Teachers and principals work together to share and exchange ideas related to the district's priorities.

The following list includes some of the topics that have been addressed this year: Bowman shared their "Dismantling Racism" curriculum and customized instructional approach; Bridge focused on their teacher-developed K-5 Social and Emotional Learning curriculum and inclusive instructional strategies; Clarke shared their inclusive approach to Project Based Learning with a focus on the benefits of inclusionary practices for all students; Diamond discussed their approach to discipline and how they are cultivating a safe and supportive school environment; Estabrook shared the ways that they have worked together to expand inclusionary practices; Fiske discussed their integrated Social and Emotional Learning practices and strategies; Harrington demonstrated the unique ways they have created a culture that attends to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is our hope that by integrating the sharing of best practices into our monthly meetings, we will begin to develop a common language and philosophy around topics of greatest importance. We also see this exchange of ideas as a platform that, if so desired, will allow us to take these great ideas to scale.

We also share best practices in "Job Alikes," which are quarterly meetings when best practices are shared between and among staff members. For example, LHS Resource Room teachers recently participated in Job Alikes and teachers from eighth grade to develop a shared understanding of students' strengths and challenges and to examine their own practices. Job Alikes were the catalyst for the parent/caregiver meetings implemented at Bridge TLP and now at Estabrook TLP.

15. I've heard there are issues with transition planning after high school. Although my kids are still middle schoolers, can you discuss any changes or improvements planned for transition, particularly the college admissions process?

Response: There are two transition counselors at the high school to support special education students in their postsecondary transition. Additionally, since 2016, the department has held regular presentations for parents to prepare for college. 'My Child is on an IEP: What Do We Need to know for College' will be held again on May 23, 2019. We have also held a College Disabilities Panel entitled 'How Will College Disability Services Help' with representatives from Boston

Program question

<p><i>U., UMass Lowell, and Middlesex Community College. These session have been held for several years, with dwindling attendance; therefore, our current plan is to launch a website with such resources.</i></p>	
<p>16. Has the district performed an evaluation of cost effectiveness of a transition program with the full number of 18-22 Lexington residents requiring such a program? If not, can this analysis be completed? Can the district look to other school districts that have built these in house programs for models, etc? Is the district committed to building this program in house?</p> <p><i>Response: In planning for our own 18-22 year old program, we visited other programs, more with a lens towards programming. We did perform a cost-benefit analysis based on tuitions and our current finding is that it is more cost-effective to provide services and have the program outside the district at present. The commitment to the program was to have out students continue to be connected to the town. The current thinking on transition programs is that there is a benefit to having them based away from the high school and more in community- or college- based settings, natural settings, in which to pursue their goals.</i></p>	<p>Program question</p>
<p>17. There has been confusion around transition services at the high school and the district's commitment to providing these services in-house. Many families begin transition planning in 8th grade, and with the lack of clarity it is hard for families to plan on staying in Lexington when there are limited services in place currently and mixed messaging as to the future commitments. Is there a commitment to provide more robust transition services in-district? What timeframe?</p> <p><i>Response: Our students have a variety of transition needs and every special education student who has reached the age of 14 has a Transition Planning Form individualized to their future goals. As previously stated, there is no current plan to develop our own 18-22 year old program onsite for the aforementioned reasons.</i></p>	<p>Program question</p>
<p>18. Will an evaluation be made of the need for the DLP high school program? Can this be considered in space needs prior to a new high school build?</p> <p><i>Response: There is not now an evaluation planned for this need. The DLP was a consideration in the Lexington Hlgh School Statement of Interest that was recently submitted to the Massachusetts School Building Authorities. The SOI is essentially a grant application for a new or renovated high school.</i></p>	<p>Program question</p>
<p>19. Why are high school special education programs typically not audited?</p>	<p>Program question</p>

<p><i>Response: As part of our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Our Call to Action effort, the district will be engaged in an Equity Audit for all grade spans, including the high school. Additionally, if a program that is being evaluated has a high school component, the high school is included in the evaluations.</i></p>	
<p>20. How will special education work with the redistricting task force with respect to placement of subseparate and specialty programs across the district?</p> <p><i>Response: Lexington Public Schools recently contracted with AppGeo, and we are engaged in a comprehensive redistricting process that will include the examination of the placements of sub-separate and district-wide specialized programming. The Superintendent, the Project Manager, Dr. Maureen Kavanaugh, and the Director of Special Education, will work together with building leaders, parents, and stakeholders to ensure that there is a solid understanding of our students' needs in each program and whether and how any redistricting moves may potentially benefit students in a particular program or school.</i></p>	<p>Program question</p>
<p>21. How are Programs housed in each of the schools individualized for IEP students? If there are students who do not fit the criteria to be part of the program, but who need similar or identical services, how come they cannot be part of a group, for example, a self-regulation group in the TLP?</p> <p><i>Response: All decisions for placement and services are made at IEP meetings, and any placement in a program is a serious decision in that it is a matter of least restrictive environment for the child. Creative solutions can be developed by a building-based Child Study Team or through Tier 1, 2, and 3 supports in general education services can be accessed for such support.</i></p>	<p>Program question</p>
<p>22. Can you outline some of the support you give for children who are suffering mental health issues such as anxiety and depression besides school counseling?</p> <p><i>Response: The Therapeutic Learning Program (TLP) supports students with emotional disabilities. The programs are at Bridge, Estabrook, Clarke, Diamond, and LHS. Each program has a full time counselor dedicated to the program who works closely with the TLP teacher, school staff, families, and outside service providers.</i></p>	<p>SPED services</p>
<p>23. Can you please outline the steps that you take when you experience school refusal from a child struggling with some issues (including mental health) and what you do if each step along the way is not successful?</p>	<p>SPED services</p>

<p><i>Response: The first step is to work with the school counselor. Attendance is mandatory; therefore, principals also are involved. Principals often initiate "Child Study Teams" or the equivalent in their buildings to engage a number of stakeholders in the process of exploring strategies and ideas to assist a child who may be struggling or who needs more support. If the issues rise to the level of needing serious intervention, the student can be referred for a special education evaluation, if not already on an IEP.</i></p>	
<p>24. Why don't we have enough adaptive sports and Paralympic sports options?</p> <p><i>Response: We do have adaptive physical education for our students who require such a service. We do not do any Paralympic training.</i></p>	SPED services
<p>25.</p> <p><i>Response: The Director of Special Education had heard talk of greater partnership with the Lexington Recreation department to provide more inclusive services/camp options. We are hopeful that this is something we can look forward to in future years. We have been meeting with the Town Recreation Director and our specialists will be helping to train the Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist who was recently hired.</i></p>	SPED services
<p>26. What criteria does a team apply when making a determination for needed ESY?</p> <p><i>Response: Maintenance of skills and prevention of regression is the criteria.</i></p>	SPED services
<p>27. Can the team "wait and see" if a student experiences substantial regression during a break in service before determining whether ESY services should be proposed?</p> <p><i>Response: No, they do not have to 'wait and see' if substantial regression has been determined over a break.</i></p>	SPED services
<p>28. Is there an ESY manual for parents?</p> <p><i>Response: Information can be obtained from the MADESE website on ESY.</i></p>	SPED services
<p>29. Many students exhibit similar behaviors, struggles, and challenges. While every IEP is individual, and every child is different, it is useful to have a set of strategies that staff can use, or at least start off with, for things like incentives to extinguish problem behaviors, assist with executive functioning deficits, communication, accommodation implementations, and so on. That such best practices either do not appear to exist or are not utilized is a conversation that is had frequently among parents. There is often the feeling as if similar students have not been encountered before based</p>	*** Julie? Staffing and school experience

on staff behavior, even though their challenges do not appear to be particularly unique. In addition, there appear to be patterns in terms of parent satisfaction between the different schools based on what parents talk about. Which is to say, some schools have some level of best practices implemented, and others do not appear to have anything in place.

Do you have a plan to create a robust set of best practices for staff to use to address common issues?

Is there a plan to improve consistency of experience between the different schools?

Response: The Lexington Public Schools have a robust counseling department that includes social workers. Students who have executive functioning deficits often work with these individuals to develop strategies to help address their challenges. Additionally, our middle schools have Guided Learning for students in the general educational setting who have executive functioning challenges. All schools have adopted Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to incentivize and improve social and emotional outcomes for all children, including those with disabilities or those from underrepresented groups.

30. It is very often that emails go unanswered for long periods, seemingly for simple things.

Is there a policy on timelines to respond to parent emails by SPED staff?

If so, can this, and all other policies pertaining to SPED, be posted publicly on the LPS web site?

Response: This is surprising, as a SEPAC member recently emailed us to say how much communication has improved in the last 5 ½ years. Communication is important to us. We reinforce regularly with staff that emails and phone calls should be returned in a timely manner, and if more time is needed for an informed response, then it should be communicated that the email/phone call was received and a response will be forthcoming. Additionally, we understand that in the past SEPAC parents have expressed concern that when they copy their advocate or others (e.g. the Superintendent) on emails, it often is the case that the ETS or others will respond, but will not “reply all.” Our assumption is that avoiding the “reply all” could be an effort to maintain confidentiality, as we usually request specific permission to share information with others. It might also be the case that the communication chain is lengthy and involved and more appropriately handled by the ETS. The Superintendent and the Director of Special

Staffing and school experience

<p><i>Education will discuss this with their respective teams at an upcoming meeting.</i></p> <p><i>As for policies, we can put a link to the MADESE on our website for reference to regulations.</i></p>	
<p>31. The district and the Superintendent is focused on improving inclusion opportunities for students. To make that inclusion meaningful and successful, proper supports are a critical first step. Aides are often the people most likely to be supporting special education students as these students spend more time in general education settings. How is the district ensuring that the aides are properly trained and compensated for their increasingly important roles? The district has several categories of aides. How is the category determined and are those reviewed periodically? For example, certain programs appear to only have one category of aides allotted to them (SSI for ILP, IA for DLP, etc). Is that appropriate?</p> <p><i>Response: There are different categories due to the specific needs of the students in each program. Compensation for aides was recently reviewed by the Superintendent, the Director of Special Education, and others, and adjustments were made that are favorable to aides who may not have been compensated appropriately in the past. We are currently working with the Lexington Education Association (LEA) and HR to develop a more consistent training module for paraprofessionals in our programs.</i></p>	<p>Staffing and school experience</p>
<p>32. Job listings state that special education employees report to both the school principal and the director of special education. In observation, it appears that the principal has the bulk of say-so in the day to day operations of staff and implementations of accommodations and supports. The appearance is that the department of special education does not have true boots on the ground control over the details of how a plan is implemented and day to day operations.</p> <p>How does the special education department ensure its vision, priorities, and standards are met if the staff report to the principal, who is not in that department, may have their own ideas and ways of operating, and also not a special education expert?</p> <p>33. As the director of special education, how do you manage so many staff that all report directly to you? There must be hundreds? How do you manage quality of services given that you must only rarely be able to see the staff that report to you in action?</p> <p>How do you achieve consistency across schools given that each principal can make individual decisions and is likely to have different philosophies and approaches?</p>	<p>Staffing and school experience</p>

<p><i>Response: With the restructuring 5 years ago, each building has a dedicated Evaluation Team Supervisor (ETS). The ILP, due to the complexity of the needs of the students, has its own ETS, one each at the pre-school elementary level and one at the secondary level. This team of ETSs, along with the Transition Coordinator and BCBA Coordinator meets weekly with the Director and Assistant Director. These meetings are crucial in maintaining standards, sharing best practices, and collaborating and maintaining consistency. In addition, we meet individually with staff for consult and mentoring.</i></p> <p><i>Principals are very important in maintaining high standards and consistency, as they are ultimately responsible for their buildings. The department maintains open communication with all principals and on occasion do see things differently, but we would not have been able to make the progress we have made in the last five years without these relationships.</i></p>	
<p>34. Can you give an update on the inclusion specialist for Harrington's DLP? Is there a timeline for hiring?</p> <p><i>Response: There will be an update in a letter to DLP parents in May.</i></p>	<p>Staffing and school experience</p>
<p>35. Can you give some examples of where you think Special Education shines in Lexington, and the most pressing areas for improvement? What are your near-term priorities and longer-term priorities?</p> <p><i>Response: Our programs and services speak for themselves. We take great pride in the fact that we hear from many families who tell us that they moved here because our services and supports have been recommended to them. Maintaining program quality and effectiveness along with the growth and space issues will continue to be a challenge. Also, LPS is ahead of the curve with the passage of legislation for the screening of students with dyslexia. Screening began last May, and most importantly, the capacity of the staff in the area of reading instruction has grown greatly due to the professional development the department has offered over the past four years.</i></p>	<p>Vision and goals for SPED</p>
<p>36. What change are you most proud of in the Special Education Department since your hire?</p> <p><i>Response: We are proud of the changes made in restructuring the department to provide consistent support to students, teachers, and parents; restructuring of the TLP to provide consistent and full time counseling; the provision of high quality professional development in reading to all staff; a central office that works to support parents and buildings; retention of an ETS group that remains engaged, collaborative and progressive. All of the above and more represents a</i></p>	<p>Vision and goals for SPED</p>

<p><i>change in the culture of the department from that which existed in 2013, which we believe is communicated through positive survey results and improved communication. Above all else, we are proud of the quality and the excellence of the staff we support.</i></p>	
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Questions for Val Viscosi, Director of Counseling	Category/Topic
<p>1. What is the procedure for Counseling to ensure that 504 students are receiving their accommodations?</p> <p><i>Response: Section 504 plans are distributed by counselors to the educators who work with the student. Counselors facilitate the process of distribution, and administrators (such as Assistant Principals, Principals, Deans, and Department Heads) are involved when necessary to ensure implementation of the accommodations. If you are concerned about implementation of accommodations, please notify your child's counselor, so they can work with your child's team to ensure that your child's accommodations are being implemented.</i></p>	504 Process
<p>2. If there is a dispute on needing an accommodation, what is the procedure?</p> <p><i>Response: Accommodations are generally agreed upon via the Section 504 team process. Parent/guardian voice is very important in the process. If you disagree with the team, please let your team know at the eligibility meeting. If your concerns are not addressed through the team process, please notify your child's counselor. If your concerns are not resolved by your child's school-based Section 504 team, please contact the Director of Counseling.</i></p>	504 Process
<p>3. I don't think that inclusivity is being promoted enough. Can you do more buddies program where kids can find friends among disabled peers? One girl from my son's classroom was really into being friends with him, her interest was supported by school, but it was not reinforced by school or stimulated by teachers.</p> <p><i>Response: Inclusivity and friendships are an important part of every child's life. The LPS recognize that students with disabilities often need additional supports to be included and form friendships with peers. While the district addresses inclusivity and friendships through a variety of tiered programming, from school-wide to group and individual programs and services, there is always room for more support. Please let us know if there is a specific need that is not being met, so we can be responsive to your child's unique needs.</i></p>	Inclusion

<p>4. For Both Ellen & Val: Are there plans to do another SPED survey like was done in 2012?</p> <p><i>Response: Please see Ellen's response to question #11 above. As stated above The Counseling Department does gather information and feedback about programming and services from students and parents through a variety of assessments, including periodic surveys, program exit feedback, focus and advisory groups, as well as examining impact through other data points, such as increase in desired behaviors.</i></p>	<p>Opportunities for feedback</p>
<p>5. Have we seen an increase in children needing behavioral support in Lexington in the past few years? Does staff (including general education staff) have the support necessary to appropriately educate these children with their peers?</p> <p><i>Response: Behavioral needs of students fluctuate over time. The staff are lifelong learners in terms of building their capacity to serve the needs of the whole child. Over the past several years, there has been a focus in the LPS on building skill-sets to meet the diverse social-emotional needs of needs of students in general education settings, as we have come to embrace social-emotional support as a shared responsibility, and one from which all students can benefit. This is evident via the professional learning opportunities in the district, such as the trauma-informed courses provided free of charge. Schoolwide, classroom and adjunct curriculum, programs, and services have grown in the past few years, providing more supports proactively to reduce the need for responsive services.</i></p>	<p>Services questions</p>
<p>6. Can you outline some of the support you give for children who are suffering mental health issues such as anxiety and depression besides school counseling?</p> <p><i>Response: *Note from Dr. Hackett: I recently observed a 7th grade Health lesson on anxiety and depression at Diamond Middle School. It was an outstanding lesson that was part of a unit that helps teach students how to identify the signs of depression, how to access a trusted adult if they or a friend is in need of help, and how to understand that anxiety and depression are common, serious medical illness that require attention and treatment.</i></p> <p><i>In addition to the Health education that is provided in our schools, in every school there are universal prevention programs to preempt escalation of need in terms of mental health services and supports. One example of this is the K-12 Counseling Curriculum that focuses social-emotional learning in the classroom for all students</i></p>	<p>Services question</p>

aimed at teaching the skills necessary for happy, healthy development. For students who need additional support, individual and group counseling are available via counselors and social workers at school, regardless of Section 504 or Special Education eligibility. These interventions generally focus on ways that students can manage their mental health issues during the school day, to maximize their access to educational programming. Often school-based counselors and social workers collaborate with parents and outside service providers, such as therapists or community agencies, to build an ongoing cohesive system of support for students to meet their unique needs.

7. Can you please outline the steps that you take when you experience school refusal from a child struggling with some issues (including mental health) and what you do if each step along the way is not successful?

Response: School refusal is a complex challenge, as diverse as are our students. There are many reasons why a student may be unwilling or unable to attend school. Generally the first step is assessment of the problem, for example, is the student avoiding school because of a particular challenge at school, or is the student having difficulty leaving home, and why. Parents/guardians are important members of the team in determining the underlying challenges, and a plan for re-entry to school. In some cases, structured assessment tools are used to assess this issue. Typically a plan is developed between the student, parent/guardian, and the school team to have the student return to the school with necessary supports, sometimes on a gradual basis. Often outside service providers are part of constructing and supporting this plan. Often the plan incorporates built in opportunities for the student to receive support during the school day, learning strategies for managing their mental health issues so they can participate as fully as possible in the school day. In some cases a more comprehensive system of supports is necessary of the student to return to school, such as a more specialized program of supports or mental health intervention outside of school, such as partial day programs or hospitalization to stabilize mental health needs before the student can successfully return to school. In qualifying cases, the LPS provide hospital or home tutoring to continue the educational program while the student is receiving mental health treatment that confines them to the hospital or home. Confinement to the home or hospital is considered the most restrictive of placements for students, as those placements are devoid or limited in peer group, and do not replicate the educational program

Services question

that students access at school. It can be very reinforcing for students to be out of school for an extended period of time, and be daunting for them to return the longer they are absent from school. Ultimately the goal is to develop the least restrictive plan for the student, providing the just right balance of support to have them in the school environment as much as possible, as soon as possible, while meeting their mental health needs.