

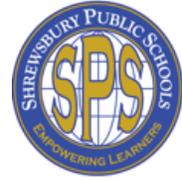


## SHREWSBURY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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To: Shrewsbury School Committee Members

From: Meg Belsito, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services

Re: 18-22 Special Education Program Development

Date: November 8, 2021

As you know, Shrewsbury Public Schools prides itself on equity and access for all students. This can be seen within all of our schools and within our community partnerships. Shrewsbury High School currently provides opportunities for students with and without disabilities to access internships and vocational opportunities within the high school and local community-based settings.

Historically, the Shrewsbury Public Schools has referred students who are ages 18-22, and who require special education services after their high school education, to public and private approved special education programs outside of the district. Many of these students access Assabet Valley Collaborative's (AVC) Evolution program. This program is now located at the AVC headquarters in Marlborough, Ma. from 2011 until this year, Evolution was located at Shrewsbury High School in space that had been renovated for this program in a joint effort with AVC, and where AVC rented the space from the school district. This arrangement ended effective this year due to our district's need to reclaim the space at SHS for additional space as a result of the high level of enrollment at SHS.

Best practices in transition services for this student population have continued to evolve, including an increased emphasis on providing community-based opportunities for students to develop key skills related to independent living, including employment. Creating our own 18-22 program for students entitled to these services beyond high school will allow for our students to

receive instruction to help reach their post-secondary vision, employment opportunities, local community experience and access to independent living skills within their town of residence. Our vision and hope is to create a program that will support our 18-22 student population with disabilities while also including peers without disabilities as partners in work and social opportunities.

Given recent increases in federal grant funding for special education that can be used as start-up funding, the Special Education Department is beginning an investment in these students to develop a community-based education program that targets the students' post-secondary vision, while providing direct functional academic instruction, employment skills, community experiences, and planning for post-school adult living to help reach each student's individual goals.

Students with disabilities who defer their diploma or who are earning their certificate of attainment will require a curriculum that focuses on independent living, functional academic skills, and employment skills. The curriculum(s) that will be purchased will require the following domains: Social and Relationship Skills, Employment Skills, Independent Living Skills, Functional Academic Skills, Independence Skills, College Readiness Skills, Vocational Skills, Travel Training Skills, and Internet Safety Skills.

Our goal is to offer the least restrictive environment for our students ages 18-22 with this new program beginning in the fall of 2022. Students currently enrolled with AVC Evolution will be afforded the opportunity to stay with their current placement, and we will not "recruit" existing Shrewsbury Evolution students to change programs, although we know that we must consider any family requests that may emerge. AVC's quality programming has been beneficial for our students and quite successful over the years. Our intention to form this new program is not due to the quality of the Evolution program, which has been strong, but rather to meet what we feel is our obligation to provide a free appropriate education for 18-22 year olds within our community, given that we will have sufficient resources to do so. This year we currently have 16 students enrolled in Evolution. Next year, our graduating class of students that will enter into entitlement will be approximately four students, and over the next two fiscal years, the total number of students requiring this level of continued education will grow to approximately 24 students. Beginning this work now with a lower enrollment number will provide time and opportunity for thoughtful planning. Of note, the baseline for tuition for one student at Evolution during fiscal year 2021 is \$54,000, plus the additional cost of transporting the students to Marlborough, so a secondary benefit of providing a local program within our community may be cost efficiency.

Because this programming should be based out in the community, our next steps will be to secure a program site and design services for educational, community-based job development, transition and vocational assessments/portfolios, job coaching and travel training. By developing this program and services, we believe we will foster successful long-term outcomes for our students with disabilities as they transition from high school to adulthood, and ultimately, developing and fostering the connection and belonging to our community outside the walls of the public school system.

An excellent example of this kind of community-based program is right next door in Westborough. Their age 18-22 program is based in a downtown Westborough business created for this purpose, the BORO Sugar Shack. You can find information about this program and links to various news media pieces about it on the BORO website [here](#). We have had conversations with our counterparts in Westborough and visited the BORO Sugar Shack in our efforts to learn more about their approach, and are in the beginning stages of considering how to potentially bring forward a similar program here in Shrewsbury.

We look forward to presenting information about this initiative and answering your questions at your meeting on November 17.