



November 7, 2023

To: Shrewsbury School Committee

From: Meg Belsito, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services
Meghan Bartlett, Assistant Director of Special Education and PPS
Christine Pellerin, RISE Program Coordinator
Jennifer Tabor, Maple & Main Retail Manager

Re: Update on Reaching Independence through Supported Employment (RISE)

Overview

Since Student Services' last Reaching Independence through Supported Employment (RISE) update in March of 2023, we have seen program expansion, relocation to 557 Main Street, and the opening of retail space, Maple & Main. It has been an exciting time for the RISE students, staff, and families. For review, the goal of RISE is to provide a post-secondary transition program designed for students ages 18 – 22 who through the Team process qualify for additional learning opportunities following their high school experience. The goal of this program is to provide students with the skills and experiences they need to successfully and independently navigate the local community. The focus is to increase students' overall independence with functional life skills, employment opportunities, and community access.

Relocation to 557 Main Street, Shrewsbury

During the 2022-2023 school year, RISE had 3 students, 1 Program Coordinator, and 1 Job Coach, and the program was located at Shrewsbury High School. With the successful renovation of leased space secured through the procurement process, the RISE program moved to 557 Main Street, Shrewsbury at the end of June 2023. With the move to the new location, 2 Special

Education Teachers and 6 Job Coaches were hired in order to support the upcoming growth in enrollment. In July 2023, the 3 students, along with last year's 13 seniors, participated in extended school year services at our new location which allowed all students to successfully transition to the new space.

Projected Enrollment

Given what we know about our current students and their needs, we are projecting the following enrollment for the next four years. Please keep in mind that students may enter the program at age 18 and stay, if appropriate, up to age 22. Students will be aging into the program, exiting the program, and remaining in the program during the course of these four years.

School Year	Student Enrollment
2023-2024	16
2024-2025	23
2025-2026	29
2026-2027	28

RISE Program

Throughout their day, RISE students work in small groups for all academic lessons and vocational opportunities. Data collection occurs throughout all learning opportunities and careful progress monitoring ensures appropriate instructional methodologies for students. Skill areas targeted include employment, functional academics, community access and safety, health and relationships, independent living, and leisure skills. Students receive direct instruction in each of these skill areas that include hands-on and technology-rich practice opportunities. Skills are taught and practiced within the classroom environment than worked on in the community in real-life situations. Students also participate in community-based activities to learn and practice skills related to independent living, these might include shopping, restaurants, community leisure activities, and travel training.

Maple & Main Retail Space

Once building renovations were complete, we were able to hire a Retail Manager whose responsibilities included all of the merchandising strategy, store operations, and student instruction with both customer services and product development. Maple & Main's grand opening was held on November 3, 2023. Our store has a mix of candy and snacks, Shrewsbury products and apparel, and a rotating/seasonal mix of "pop-up" products. All of these decisions are made in the context of our ability to support students with disabilities in the basics of customer service, inventory production/management, and cashier training.

Maple & Main provides opportunities for students to practice a variety of transferable employment skills in an environment that mimics future employment opportunities. Through our retail store students can practice skills such as soft skills, customer service, restocking, inventory, custodial, etc.

Budget and Funding Sources

A program-specific budget has been provided via the School Committee report on March 15, 2023. The total program costs for FY24 are budgeted at just over \$1.1M. The cost per pupil is less than what we would otherwise be spending to send these same students to an out-of-district placement.

For FY24 funding has been available from two sources. First, the district used the American Rescue Plan Grant (one-time funding), totaling \$390,954 for start-up expenses related to equipping and outfitting the educational spaces and retail operation. Second, we are using available funds (FY23 carry-over) from the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA-240 grant) to fund the staffing and facility-related expenses. The IDEA grant is an annual, recurring grant and we plan to use this source and town-appropriated funds in future fiscal years (FY25 and beyond) to fund the recurring RISE Program costs. These are dollars that would otherwise be budgeted in our special education tuition account to pay for these required services.

Building Maintenance and Operations

The district uses a contracted service for custodial support twice a week that began in October of 2023. The RISE students and staff work on a daily basis to bring trash outside to the dumpsters, restock the bathrooms and kitchen, sweeping the floors, and cleaning surfaces.

Security

The district installed a video surveillance and alarm system during the summer of 2023 that is on our network and has real-time view and approximately 3 weeks of storage capacity. Keycard entry was installed at the rear exit door and the door from the retail space into the learning environment. The cameras and keycard access were installed by the School Department contractors.

We purchased a cash register/point of sale system and software, Square. We expect to primarily have cash-free payments but will inevitably have some portion of cash receipts. We have an onsite drop safe and make regular bank deposits.

Capital Campaign

A team consisting of the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships and Wellbeing, Shrewsbury parents, and community members has already begun to meet to discuss fundraising support of the RISE Program. A RISE information kit is being finalized as a tool to begin to share with potential donors as an effort to share the mission, goals, and further details about RISE and Maple & Main. The purpose of the capital campaign is to further expand learning, transportation, community and employment opportunities for our students. More information will be available during the winter of 2024.