

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEAC)
TO THE ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA SCHOOL BOARD
ALEXANDRIA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (ACPS)
T.C. Williams High School
Career and Counseling Center Conference Room

Meeting Minutes
September 18, 2019

Attendees:

Meagan Alderton
Michael Behrmann, Vice Chair
Coral Childs
Courtney Davis
Abena Durity
Cindy Hart, Chair
Cherlyn Jenkins
Pree Ann Johnson
Margaret Lorber
Terri Mozingo
Deanne McNulty
Janet Reese
Tammy Rotz
Alexis Stackhouse
Sandra Strachan-Vieira
J-Lynn Van Pelt
Theresa (Terry) Werner
Jeff Zack

Call to Order

Cindy Hart officially called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance.

Introductory Comments

Cindy Hart reviewed the SEAC statement of purpose “to advise the City of Alexandria School Board and the Superintendent about the priorities and strategies for meeting the needs of children with disabilities”.

Cindy also distributed various question sheets (member info, ideas for acronym card, and topics of interest for presentation to group).

Cindy also identified some “rules of engagement” for the meetings including all members are equal, all members should participate, and all members should respect each other’s privacy and especially the privacy of any minors.

Cindy would like to discuss VA state guidance on public comments later.

Public Comment

None

Approval of Minutes

The August 14, 2019 minutes were circulated for review. The minutes were approved, as amended.

Report from Director of Specialized Education

Terry Werner announced upcoming Crisis Prevention and Intervention (CPI) training for school personnel.

Terry then discussed the results of the VA Department of Education (VDOE) audit of ACPS. The first half of the state report aligns with the independent evaluation commissioned by ACPS 4 years ago, so she did not spend much time on this part of the report. The biggest issue here is progress reporting, which needs to be done on the same schedule as report cards, including interim report cards. ACPS hopes to meet this requirement by the second quarter of this school year.

The second half of the report focuses on noncompliance with standard policies. This again corresponds with the findings of the independent evaluation done by PCG. Approximately 75% of these issues have already been addressed by ACPS.

Terry also stated that ACPS received a “green” rating on the latest VDOE performance report, the first time in several years. However, she remains concerned about graduation rates for special education students. Standards of Learning (SOL) scores are also up, but require more work.

Discussion: Were there any patterns to the noncompliance with standard policies? No, they were random and none were substantial. They indicate a lack of attention to detail. An interdepartmental committee is being established and will begin working after the October 7,

2019 School Board meeting where School Board members will vote on the action plan to implement PCG recommendations.

There are concerns that the ACPS responses to the PCG and VDOE reports are too vague. A SEAC member specifically mentioned page 14 of the corrective action plan in particular the section on reading. It is a very complex problem that involves many parts of ACPS, however, this is the worst or second worst reading report that member has ever seen in any corrective action plan in the last 10 years. In addition, the member was very concerned about the Career and Transition and the Behavior sections mentioned in the state report. The VDOE report overlaps with the PCG report and there is a detailed action plan for the PCG report. It was noted that SEAC played an active role in development of the PCG action plan.

Are SOL scores up because parents are having their children opt out of the tests? How does the Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP) impact SOL scores?

Students who opt out of the SOL exams are not part of the SOL score calculations. ACPS re-evaluated the number of students taking the VAAP tests. Some of them have been moved to SOL testing. In the short term, SOL scores may decline because former VAAP students have not learned SOL taking skills.

There was a brief discussion on declining SOL scores, especially in reading for special education students. (See attached chart on Reading SOL Scores for Students with Disabilities.) This has been true for a number of years and ACPS does not seem to be addressing it.

ACPS is concerned about the number of students taking VAAP tests as these students do not typically earn a standard high school diploma. Many of them are directed to VAAP in elementary school and that is too soon to make that decision. Perhaps this is something SEAC can education special education parents on in the future. VDOE has a time line of key decision points online for special education parents.

Has VDOE approved the PCG action plan? No, it is an ACPS action plan and the state is not involved. However, there is a separate corrective action report for the VDOE audit that VDOE does approve.

Will SEAC be able to review the corrective action report? Yes. SEAC has been involved in the PCG action plan and in the VDOE corrective action report.

It was noted that in the past, VDOE focused on the special education process, but beginning in 2000 began focusing on progress made toward education goals. There are two parts to special education, compliance and quality and they need to be balanced. ACPS has good policies and procedures, but implementation of those policies and procedures is inconsistent or even nonexistent at times.

Report from SEAC Chair

Cindy Hart has been review VDOE guidance on SEACs and is working on a SEAC handbook. She is concerned about the lack of SEAC visibility with special education parents. A strong SEAC is necessary to review and implement both the PCG action plan and the VDO corrective action plan.

Report from School Board Liaison

Meagan Alderton announced that the School Board's priorities will be released on Friday September 20, 2019. The priorities will align to the Strategic Plan. Implementation of the PCG action plan will remain a top priority.

Discussion: It was stated that human resources need to align with special education needs.

Has work begun on the "ACPS 2025 Strategic Plan"? Yes. The SEAC Chair Cindy Hart and Vice Chair Michael Behrmann will be part of that process. Special education parents from Douglas MacArthur Elementary School, John Adams Elementary School, and the Cora Kelly School for Math, Science and Technology are being recruited for a special education focus group for the ACPS 2025 Strategic Plan.

Will parents of special education middle and high school students be included? The principals from those schools are included. The School Board Liaison will check on the inclusion of special education parents.

How will the "High School Project" impact special education for high school students? It will not impact those students. Special education is a service provided by ACPS regardless of a student's location.

Report from the Parent Resource Center

Courtney Davis distributed a caseload information sheet.

Old Business

PCG action plan and VDOE corrective action plan have already been discussed.

New Business

SEAC priorities

Cindy Hart stated that SEAC has a large amount of data on the state of special education in ACPS from the PCG evaluation and the VDOE audit. She proposes that SEAC recommend to the School Board that the Director of Specialized Education be included on the Superintendent's leadership team. She also proposed that ACPS develop a site based evaluations on how school principals are implementing special education in their respective schools. Other ideas?

SEAC members should bring ideas on priorities to the next meeting.

Discussion: It was announced that the Superintendent already plans on including the Director of Specialized Education on his leadership team. In addition, school principals are evaluated on 7 criteria that include special education.

Should special education be a separate criterion?

Does the Director of Specialized Education participate in Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings? Not routinely. If the Director of Specialized Education is part of an IEP meeting there is a problem. Perhaps SEAC should establish a working group to create a document on roles and responsibilities of participants in the IEP process.

Can SEAC have a copy of the ACPS organizational chart? Yes. The School Board is working on an ACPS-wide Communication Plan that describes roles and responsibilities. This information will also be included in the SEAC Handbook.

We need a SEAC Scope of Work (SOW) to present to the School Board. There was some confusion over the definition of SOW. An example will be provided before the next meeting.

SEAC should identify best practices and centers of excellence and recognize them. Cross collaboration, horizontally and vertically across schools should also be recognized.

Strategies to Develop/Strengthen the SEAC Committee

Cindy is working on a SEAC Handbook. She proposes having educational presentations at SEAC meetings and keeping meetings under 2 hours. She is also looking into virtual meetings and/or videotaping meetings. She would like active working groups addressing issues. Cindy also proposes to have SEAC members attend School Board meetings (live or virtually) and report on them at SEAC meetings.

Working Groups

Cindy suggested a membership working group, an education working group (for the education of SEAC members), and a budget working group. The SEAC bylaws also need updating which will require a working group.

SEAC members should bring ideas for working groups to the next meeting or email them to Cindy at chrisindyhart@gmail.com.

Discussion: A transportation working group was suggested. So were reading and math working groups.

Announcements

Sandra Strachan-Vieira has information on grants for programs that provide robots to individuals with autism and on a program that provides career and technical education to students with disabilities. She gave this information to Terry Werner.

Terry Werner has a new Career and Technical Education staff person, Tricia Jacobs, and would like her to speak at a later meeting.

Terry also announced that VDOE has redirect funds from regional programs to individual schools and ACPS will receive approximately \$600,000. No decision has been made on how to spend it.

Adjourn

Cindy Hart called the meeting adjourned at 9:11 p.m.

Upcoming Meetings

- October 16, 2019

- November 20, 2019
- December 18, 2019
- January 15, 2020
- February 19, 2020
- March 18, 2020
- April 15, 2020
- May 20, 2020
- June 17, 2020