

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE (SEAC)
TO THE ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA SCHOOL BOARD
ALEXANDRIA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS (ACPS)
T.C. Williams High School
Library

Meeting Minutes
October 16, 2019

Attendees:

Meagan Alderton
Michael Behrmann*, Vice Chair
Coral Childs*
Courtney Davis
Cindy Hart*, Chair
Margaret Lorber
Terri Mazingo
Deborah Perry*
Hilary Sentell
Sandra Strachan-Vieira*
J-Lynn Van Pelt*
Theresa (Terry) Werner
Jeff Zack*

* voting members

Call to Order

Cindy Hart officially called the meeting to order at 7:11 p.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance. She also reminded members that Alexandria has an Open Meeting Law (Sunshine Law) that limits email communications between committee members. She suggested that members not use “reply all” in email communications and that they limit them to messages between 2 people and not the whole group.

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” and established some meeting ground rules.

Approval of Minutes

There was some discussion of the September minutes. Suggested revisions will be emailed to Coral Childs at cjchilds63@gmail.com.

Public Comment

None

Report from SEAC Chair

Cindy Hart continues to review VDOE guidance on SEACs. She participated in a recent ACPS 2025 forum. She also asked SEAC members to routinely attend (in person or virtually) school board meetings.

Report from Director of Specialized Education

Terry Werner deferred her report to “Old Business”.

Report from the Parent Resource Center

Courtney Davis distributed a flyer on educational sessions offered by the PRC. The next session will be October 28, 2019 on Augmentative and Alternative Communication.

Report from School Board Liaison

Meagan Alderton is working on getting “Special Education 101” on the school board’s agenda. The date is TBD.

Old Business

Special Education Action Plan

Terry Werner discussed the PCG/VDOE action plans starting with some background information. SEAC decided to do a special education evaluation in 2015 and issues requests for proposals (RFPs) and determined the scope of work (SOW). SEAC later revised the SOW to include ALL ACPS schools (not just a sample) and the school board allocated an additional \$600,000 for this effort. The selected contractor, PCG, performed the evaluation during the 2017-2018 school year. ACPS received the 400 page report during the summer of 2018 and began working on with members of the community to develop an action plan for implementing the 10 recommendations. The action plan was finalized in February 2019.

This action plan was put on hold when the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) also performed a special education evaluation in the spring of 2019. ACPS received the VDOE

report in August 2019. Since then, ACPS “cross walked” the two reports and consolidated the recommendations into a single action plan. To implement the action plan, an interdepartmental team with 12-15 members is being created. In addition, specialized education, English language learning, and student services are now represented on the ACPS superintendent’s leadership team. The Office of Specialized Education is also adding a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) coordinator. In addition, \$15,000 will be moved to early intervention programs in response to the VDOE finding that ACPS over-identifies minority students as emotionally disabled.

By-Laws Subcommittee

Sandra Strachan-Vieira reported that she and Cindy Hart had met with Jennifer Abbruzzese, Director of Policy and Board Initiatives to review the SEAC by-laws. Draft updated by-laws will be presented at the November SEAC meeting.

New Business

Scope of Work

Cindy Hart provided a handout on a proposed Scope of Work including the Special Education Action Plan.

Discussion: Terry Werner reminded members that there was a single action plan containing both PCG and VDOE recommendations. The action plan is in 2 parts, the first part focuses on accountability and the second part focuses on compliance. School improvement plans will be online and updated annually. There will be quarterly meetings with each school to review their progress and reports to the school board. It is not clear if there will be reports to SEAC.

Apparently not all SEAC members understand the role of an advisory committee or specifically what SEAC does. A school board advisory committee dispenses advice or recommendations to the school board. Specifically, SEAC provides recommendations to the school board on special education based on data in reports like those from PCG and VDOE. The committee is by nature reactive rather than proactive.

It was suggested that each SEAC member perform their own “crosswalk” of the action plan and provide feedback on goals and timelines. However, other members prefer to continue moving forward (the evaluation process began in 2014) and have ACPS begin implementing the action plan even if it’s not perfect.

Another member asked for clarification on SEAC’s role in drafting the action plan. Terry stated that SEAC was hugely involved. The action plan was developed by a 9 person steering committee with 5 subcommittees. The SEAC chair (Janet Eissenstat) co-chaired a subcommittee. In addition, SEAC members participated in general parent focus groups and in a SEAC specific working group.

There were concerns over the action plan goals and how they will improve outcomes. For example, the goals for instructional quality seem to be based on parent surveys which are unreliable. In addition, the survey didn’t allow parents to share negative experiences. The goal also doesn’t seem to be measurable. Terri Mazingo responded that the surveys were a starting point and that implementation of the action plan would include direction given by SEAC.

It was asked if the special education evaluations results surprised ACPS personnel. Terri responded “no”, they have been aware of the problems and they are problems common to all special education programs.

Terry continued that PCG looked at instruction first and MTSS changes in instruction will take 2-3 months to implement. SEAC members agreed with starting with instruction, but one member suggested that SEAC provide feedback during that process and asked to see ACPS work plans for implementing the action plan. Terry clarified that the work plans are internal ACPS documents not normally shared with the committee. The member insisted on seeing goals and due dates and was supported by another committee member in this demand. Terry believes that information is in another document that can be shared with the committee.

Subcommittees

Cindy Hart opened a discussion on subcommittees by proposing a subcommittee on the action plan. J-Lynn Van Pelt made a motion to create such a subcommittee. The motion was seconded by Jeff Zack and passed unanimously. Michael Behrmann will chair the subcommittee. Other members include J-Lynn, Jeff, Sandra Strachan-Vieira, and Cindy. Michael will send an email on proposed meeting times. The subcommittee will report at the next meeting.

Cindy also proposed a subcommittee on school awards including the Anne R. Lipnick Awards for Specialized Instruction that would also recognize best practices.

Sandra suggested a subcommittee on reading and math. Cindy believes the low test scores in reading and math may be related to a school’s resources (including teachers and teacher retention). Terry will provide data on the resources available to each school.

Cindy proposed a subcommittee on parent communication. Meagan Alderton suggested an outreach plan that included at least 5 new activities. Jeff suggested defining “parent engagement” in the Scope of Work first. Terry added that the PRC already communicates information on activities for parents and it has a video library of past activities available for viewing. Unfortunately the videos are not compliant with Section 508 of the United States Workforce Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and are only in English. Courtney Davis will send Cindy a list of the videos and Meagan will see about funds for 508 compliance and translation into other languages.

Sandra suggested a subcommittee to look at graduation rates and behavior management. She will prepare a written proposal for the next meeting.

Discussion: A member asked for clarification on standing committees. Standing committees include Policy and Procedures, Budget, Anne R. Lipnick Award, and By-Laws.

Another committee member asked for clarification on what a reading and math subcommittee would do. Terry suggested that it would identify disparities between schools and make recommendations to the school board on correcting them.

There was a brief discussion on the Scope of Work, what it should include and when it was due. There is no due date for the Scope of Work, but they are done annually, usually in the fall. Cindy will begin working on a draft.

A member asked if monthly meetings were enough to do everything SEAC wants to do.

Another member asked for clarification on the Open Meetings Law. The law requires that every portion of a meeting be open to public observation. This includes email discussions between 3 or more members of the committee.

Announcements

None

Adjourn

Michael Behrmann called the meeting adjourned at 9:14 p.m.

Upcoming Meetings

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