

**Alexandria City Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Meeting
TC Williams High School - 3330 King Street
Media Center**

**Monday, April 9, 2018
7:00 – 9:00 pm**

MINUTES

Call to Order – Janet Eissenstat

Introductions: Lisa Allison Lee, Peter Balas, Coral Childs, Courtney Davis, Kanika Dorsey, Janet Eissenstat, Janet Reese, Mike Routhouska, Ellen Taverna, Dr. Terry Werner, Cindy Hart.

Comments from Peter Balas, Principal of T.C. Williams High School and Mike Routhouska, Principal of William Ramsay Elementary School – This is Mr. Balas' first year at T.C. Williams and he is still "laying a foundation" for the future. Staff members have been reassigned to new areas and there are many new administrators and teachers.

Regarding special education, he is trying to figure out where they are (what the baseline is) before making any substantial changes. He is especially interested in how IEPs are written and how they can better link to class scheduling. The goal is to get the schedules of IEP students right the first time. Mr. Balas wants to see more co-teaching and more participation from general education teachers in education special education students.

Janet Eissenstat asked about the situation at the Minnie Howard campus. Mr. Balas' comments applied to both the King Street and Minnie Howard campuses. There will also be staff changes at Minnie Howard next year.

Coral Childs commented that the 504 plans also needed improved oversight. Mr. Balas responded that he eventually wanted to strengthen the 504 plan process and oversight as well.

Ellen Taverna asked Mr. Balas to clarify what he meant by having more participation by general education teachers. According to Mr. Balas, they do not participate fully in IEP meetings, they respond slowly to requests and

report information slowly. He would like to have the most talented teachers work with IEP students who need them the most.

Lisa Allison Lee asked Mr. Balas to define “talented”. He stated that a talented teacher was not only a good teacher, but also one who accepts challenges and enjoys working with IEP students.

Lisa Allison Lee asked if there would be co-teaching in honors classes. Mr. Balas did not know if there was a need for co-teaching in honors classes, but it can be done.

Dr. Terry Werner commented that not all advanced classes were called “honors classes” and that many of them are already cut aught. She refuted the belief that special education students do not take honors classes.

Lisa Allison Lee asked how this policy is communicated to parents. Dr. Werner stated that it was not well communicated now, but her office had begun working on it at the middle school level.

Coral Childs commented that it should be communicated at the high school level as well. Dr. Werner responded that students with 504 plans were NOT special education students.

Coral Childs responded that ACPS needed to remove the “silos” between different types of specialized instruction. Students with 504 plans are at a different place on the same continuum as special education students.

Janet Eissenstat agreed with Ms. Childs.

Mr. Routhouska reported that William Ramsey Elementary School currently has 900 students. It will have 750 students after Ferdinand Day Elementary School opens in fall 2018. During a typical school year, 35% of those students will turn over due to family moves. This makes monitoring their progress difficult.

Sixty percent of the students are English Language Learners (ELL), with Spanish being the most common language followed by Pashto and Amharic. Eighty-eight percent of the students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches.

The citywide autism program is housed at Ramsay with 60 students. Ramsay is fortunate to have a “dual” teacher who is both ELL and special education certified. Ramsey is on track for accreditation in all areas except science.

Dr. Terry Werner commented that the scoring for accreditation has changed. Instead of a flat 75% pass rate on the SOLs, improvement targets are used.

Mr. Routhouska added that accreditation also considers English language proficiency. All special education services at Ramsey are provided in the classroom unless an IEP specifies otherwise.

Peter Balas added that the April 23 PTA meeting would discuss the new accreditation scoring.

Janet Eissenstat asked if there was a parent support group at Ramsey for parents of special education students. Mr. Routhouska said they had just started one but that there were language and cultural issues to overcome.

Approval of March SEAC meeting minutes – No quorum. Item tabled until May meeting.

Special Education Awards update – Janet Eissenstat announced the application is available online. Deadline is April 27. Some nominations have already been received. The awards ceremony will be May 24. Dr. Terry Werner is ordering the trophies. The PRC continues to publicize the awards.

Dr. Terry Werner suggested the ceremony be 4:30-6:30 prior to the school board meeting. If school board members are expected to attend, someone needs to discuss it with Margaret Lorber.

Lisa Allison Lee suggested that nominee’s coworkers be notified so they can be there to support the nominees.

Ellen Taverna suggested that invitations be issued so people knew they were invited.

ACPS Budget process – Ellen Taverna stated that a letter had been sent to the City Council from SEAC asking members to support the school budget. Several Councilmen had responded positively. However, she is not sure there is enough support on the council to pass the school budget. She encouraged SEAC members to contact City Council members if they had not already.

Outreach Committee – The Outreach Committee met March 23 to discuss the Art on the Avenue (October 6) event. They have a budget of \$2,000 (from a VA State Department of Education grant). They propose to have attendees paint a mural and to give out balloons. They would like to have more ACPS students involved.

Dr. Terry Werner suggested the committee contact Andrew Watson for assistance.

PTAC – Janet Eissenstat and Ellen Taverna plan to attend the PTAC meeting on April 18.

Report from the Director of Specialized Instruction – Dr. Dr. Terry Werner presented the annual special education plan. The students with IEPs are counted each December 1 and reported to the state and federal Departments of Education.

The federal government allocates money to each state based on this number. The state keeps approximately 6% of the money gives the rest back to school districts as grants. Each school district then submits a plan on how it intends to spend the money. Dr. Werner then highlighted key portions of the plan.

Report from the Parent Resource Committee – Courtney Davis announced the cancellation of the independent housing workshop due to low enrollment. There will be a workshop April 25 on Preparing Students with Learning Differences for College. ACPS teachers and staff can attend this workshop for CEU credit. There will be a workshop May 2 and May 9 on guardianship.

Janet Eissenstat asked about guaranteeing workshops will run regardless of enrollment, noting that some people will not bother to sign up if they think a workshop is going to be cancelled. Janet Reese responded that the PRC

should be respectful of a speaker's time and some speakers have a minimum requirement outside of the PRC's control.

Janet Eissenstat followed up by asking the PRC to emphasize in its announcements that registration is required. Dr. Terry Werner said they would make more of an effort.

Courtney Davis said the PRC would rather have people sign up and then not show up for an event, rather than not sign up at all.

Dr. Terry Warner also noted that when people sign up, the PRC could contact them if there is a change in the program or cancellation.

Janet Eissenstat announced that Fairfax County is holding an all-day special education seminar on April 21. A variety of sessions will be held throughout the day and the keynote address will be on inclusion. Parking is limited. Registration is through the Fairfax County Public Schools PRC.

Janet Eissenstat announced a new initiative of the National Disability Institute called Disable Poverty. The goal of this initiative to "decouple" disability and poverty. The initiative has had some success with employment incentives but is having trouble finding students on a national level. Schools tend to focus on local employment instead.

Adjournment – Janet Eissenstat