

Minutes of Meeting
Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting
Date: November 30, 2022
Alexandria City High School Library

Mr. Olson called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

	Name	Role	Present	Not Present
SEAC Members				
	Rachel Dixon	Member		X
	Cindy Hart	Member	X	
	Laura Fontaine	Teacher Member	X	
	Carolyn Meza	Member		X
	Jennifer Niccolls	Member	X (participated electronically per motion)	
	William E. Olson	Co-Secretary	X	
	Kate Radt	Student Representative	X	
	Alexis Stackhouse	Member	X	
	J-Lynn Van Pelt	Member		X
Consultants				
	Meagan Alderton	School Board Liaison	X	
	Patricia Zissios	Principal Liaison	X	
	Theresa Werner	Staff Liaison	X	
Other				
	Courtney Davis	PRC Liaison		X
	Janet Reese	PRC Liaison	X	

Attendance and Introductions

Attendance was taken as reflected above. A motion was made to permit Jennifer Niccolls to participate in the meeting electronically consistent with School Board Policy BDD. After being seconded, the motion carried without objection.

The SEAC members present, and participating electronically, the consultants present, PRC Liaison Janet Reese, and the members of the public in attendance introduced themselves.

Review Meeting Norms

Mr. Olson reviewed the SEAC meeting expectations.

Public Comments

Ruchir Narayan, a parent of a Jefferson-Houston K-8 student with disabilities and the J-H PTA Special Education Liaison, spoke about the need for additional communication from teachers and administration. Mr. Narayan referenced an incident in which a non-verbal student had been assaulted.

Joyce Sullivan, a grandmother of an ACPS student with special needs, spoke about the challenges for special needs students, who do best with set routines, presented by the erratic ACPS academic schedule, especially during the Fall.

Old Business and Action Items

None

New Business and Reports

- **Reports**

- **Executive Director of Specialized Instruction Theresa Werner**

Ms. Werner spoke about the vacancies that Specialized Instruction needs to fill. Specifically, five speech therapists have resigned since September.

Ms. Werner described a new electronic progress monitoring tool, for use with respect to the progress of students with disabilities, that can be accessed by the Central Office. Previously, Specialized Instruction had tried a commercial product that did not work well. Mr. Werner stated that a spouse of a staff member developed the tool and donated it to ACPS. The progress monitoring tool is being used with respect to Q1 progress reports of students with IEPs.

Ms. Werner responded to questions from the SEAC members and the public.

Ms. Hart asked for further information about the vacancies that Specialized Instruction needs to fill, specifically with respect to Instructional Assistants (“IAs”). Ms. Werner responded that ACPS currently has 13 IA vacancies. To cover for those vacancies, ACPS has contracted for

registered behavioral technicians to fill those roles. Ms. Werner noted that such contractors are expensive and that ACPS is using ESSER funds to pay for them. Ms. Werner also noted that there are several teacher vacancies.

Ms. Werner also provided the following backgrounds on IAs – Specialized Instruction uses three categories of IAs: IA-1s who work individually with students who need one on one adult assistance, IA-2s who are assigned at the school level and often work in citywide specialized instruction classrooms, and IA-4s who are Licensed Practical Nurses who work with students with significant medical issues. Specialized Instruction does not use the IA-3 category of IAs.

Mr. Olson asked about Specialized Instruction’s Covid-19 pandemic recovery activities. Ms. Werner described Specialized Instruction’s recovery and intervention program in the 2021-2022 school year that included tutoring, Saturday school, and extended school year over the summer. Mr. Werner estimated that 275 to 300 students participated in these programs in the 2021-2022 school year and 200 students over the summer. Mr. Werner stated that the interventions have been rolled into school day interventions during this school year. Ms. Niccols asked who provides the extended school year instruction. Ms. Werner responded that ACPS utilized both its own staff and out of district hires to provide instruction for the extended school year.

- **School Board Liaison - Chairperson Meagan Alderton**

Ms. Alderton spoke about the School Board’s current work with respect to the Capital Improvement Planning (CIP) Budget. Ms. Alderton referenced ACPS’s purchase of the 1703 N. Beaugard property that will be used as a swing space. Work will need to be done to prepare that property for use as a swing space. Ms. Alderton noted that the proposed CIP budget included a \$24 million increase and that ACPS would have to work with the city government to fund those additional needs. Ms. Alderton also noted that the Board was going through its add/delete process as to the CIP budget at present.

Ms. Alderton also spoke about the Board’s examination of relevant data to guide its actions included MAP scores, Standard of Learning testing results, and social-emotional surveys. The Board is also focused on staff retention and wellness and the legislative agenda for the upcoming year at the Commonwealth level.

Ms. Alderton responded to questions from the SEAC members and the public.

Ms. Stackhouse asked about the current status of the Board's decision-making with respect to School Resource Offices (SRO) remaining in ACPS's middle schools and high school. Ms. Alderton responded that the SRO issue currently is out of the Board's hands and referred to the work of the Alexandria City Public Schools Law Enforcement Partnership (SLEP) Advisory Committee. Ms. Alderton noted that the SLEP is looking holistically at ACPS's relationship with law enforcement. Ms. Alderton noted that SLEP has conducted surveys and that SLEP's purpose is to provide recommendations developed without elective officials' involvement.

In response to a question about whether ACPS's staff salaries are competitive, Ms. Alderton said that ACPS routinely compares ACPS's salaries with other districts. Ms. Alderton noted that Rene Paschal, ACPS's Acting Executive Director of Human Resources, may have more information on this issue. Ms. Fontaine asked about any effort by ACPS to investigate why staff is leaving. Ms. Alderton responded that ACPS's practice is to conduct exit surveys of departing ACPS employees and that there has been discussion about ACPS conducting "stay surveys" of ACPS employees who choose to remain with the division.

Ms. Hart raised the issue of the ACPS calendar and the inconsistency within it during the Fall. Ms. Alderton noted that there is a calendar committee that makes recommendation for the ACPS calendar in up-coming year. There was discussion about a SEAC member looking to serve on the calendar committee to highlight the issues specific to students with disabilities. There was also discussion about SEAC inviting Margaret Browne, the ACPS Human Resources Director of Recruitment and Development, to a future meeting to discuss some of the issues that have been raised.

- **Teacher Representative**

Ms. Fontaine spoke about the challenges that teachers and staff face because of unfilled positions. At times, the unfilled positions results in teachers and staff having to take on additional responsibilities.

Ms. Werner clarified that with respect to the speech therapist vacancies, ACPS speech therapists are not picking up additional sessions. Instead, when a speech session as set forth in an IEP cannot be provided due to the speech therapist vacancies, Specialized Instruction sends a

letter to the student documenting that compensatory speech therapy sessions will be provided to the student.

○ **Student Representative**

Ms. Radt stated that the ending of the “lunch and learn” period at Alexandria City High School (ACHS) has limited the opportunities for students with medical issues to be able to participate in extra-curricular activities. Ms. Radt also stated that she has a concern that students requiring wheelchair access have less opportunity to participate in after-school activities at ACHS because the “late bus” that transports students after such activities is not wheel-chair accessible.

In addition, Ms. Radt described a concern about a bus monitor holding students with disabilities to a higher standard than neurotypical students on most busses. For example, Ms. Radt noted that this bus monitor at times attempted to stop a student with disabilities from “rocking” while sitting on the bus. Ms. Werner noted that Erin Stone, Assistant Director of City-Wide Programs (PreK-22), trains bus monitors. Ms. Alderton also stated that there is currently a shortage bus monitors.

○ **Co-Secretary**

Mr. Olson described the process of SEAC conducting work through sub-committees. Mr. Olson summarized the proposed SEAC sub-committees for the 2022-2023 school year: (1) Budget & SEAC By-Laws, (2) Equity and Inclusion, (3) Staff Recruitment, Retention, Training, and Expertise, and (4) Anne Lipnick Awards. Mr. Olson also noted that SEAC, in its 2021-2022 year-end report, recommended that Amy Creed, ACPS Career and Transition Coordinator, be invited to a future SEAC meeting. There was discussion about the proposed sub-committees.

Specifically, there was further discussion about ACPS’s efforts to recruit additional special education teachers. Ms. Werner noted that ACPS is starting a new partnership with George Washington University (GWU). Under this partnership, ACPS hires GWU education students as IAs in their first year and then as teachers on provisional status in their second year. Ms. Stackhouse asked if ACPS has considered a partnership with a Historically Black College or University (HCBU). Ms. Werner responded that no local HCBU has a special education teacher

program but that George Mason, James Madison University, and University of Virginia, have such programs.

Ms. Niccolls asked about ACPS's efforts outside of Virginia to recruit for teachers. Ms. Werner stated that she has done so in the past including attending a Pennsylvania job fair in her first five years with ACPS. Ms. Alderton also noted that ACPS is working on its salary scale for teachers. Ms. Niccolls asked about whether the availability of affordable housing affects ACPS's ability to recruit teachers and staff. Discussion ensued about a City of Alexandria program providing a stipend for home purchases within the city and set asides for affordable housing in new developments.

Dr. Zissios noted that her school, Lyles-Crouch Elementary, is currently short three teachers, including due to the resignation of teacher over Thanksgiving break who could not find a place to live. Dr. Zissios also noted that the re-development of the Heritage property in South Old Town is affecting the availability of housing for families at her school.

Ms. Stackhouse asked about how the School Board uses SEAC's end of year report. Ms. Alderton noted that SEAC's end of year report is uploaded to the School Board's consent calendar. Ms. Alderton also noted that the School Board took particular notice of SEAC's recommendations in its 2021-2022 End of Year report on equity issues.

Regarding the proposed Equity and Inclusion sub-committee, Ms. Alderton expressed interest in SEAC looking into why the academic performance of students with disabilities, based on testing, has not moved compared with that of English learners. Mr. Olson proposed incorporating Ms. Alderton's comments into the description of the Equity and Inclusion sub-committee.

- **Parent Resource Center**

Ms. Reese stated that the Parent Resource Center has scheduled four webinars on building student directed IEPs. Students have a right to participate in the IEP process beginning at age 14. The Parent Resource Center has also been working on providing monthly support to Amharic and Arabic speaking families.

Ms. Reese noted that the PRC would like to provide further support to the Spanish speaking community and information to families on the supports needed and available to children in the citywide classrooms. Ms. Reese noted that the PRC is considering a workshop on

Medicaid waivers and the benefits available through social security when a student with disabilities turns eighteen.

Ms. Stackhouse referenced a new Department of Defense policy that permits attorneys who work within the Department of Defense to attend IEP meetings of families of service members.

- **Principal Liaison and Members**

Dr. Zissios and the SEAC members had no further comments or reports.

Future Business

SEAC's next meeting is scheduled for January 18, 2023.

A motion was made to adjourn the meeting. After being seconded, the motion carried without objection. The meeting ending at approximately 8:45 PM.