

Date: January 27, 2017

For ACTION X

For INFORMATION

Board Agenda Yes X No

FROM: Janet Eissenstat, Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee
Crystal Prall, Vice-Chair, Special Education Advisory Committee

THROUGH: Theresa Werner, JD., Executive Director of Specialized Instruction
Terri Mazingo, Ed.D., Chief Academic Officer
Alvin L. Crawley, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Ramee Gentry, Chair
and Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: 2016-17 SEAC Plan and Scope of Work

BACKGROUND: The attached plan outlines the proposed scope of work for your Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC).

The SEAC role, as mandated by the Commonwealth of Virginia, is to:

1. Advise the local school division of needs in the education of children with disabilities;
2. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
3. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
4. Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services;
5. Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board; and
6. Participate in the review of the local school division's annual plan.

To clarify how SEAC members view the many ongoing initiatives under the committee's purview, the initiatives are addressed below in the context of ACPS 2020, the strategic plan for the school division. Specific objectives for the 2016-2017 school year are summarized on the last page.

As always, the SEAC priority will be to identify the areas of greatest need for students with disabilities and work to identify the areas that have the most potential to positively impact the lives of students with disabilities.

At the forefront of Educational Excellence is the need to understand what learning has occurred and what interventions are effective when learning is compromised. The SEAC has emphasized the need for effective proactive interventions for special education students who are failing to improve their reading, writing and math abilities. The SEAC will continue to review the intervention strategies available to ACPS teachers, will review the implementation of these interventions, make recommendations to administrative staff for improvement of existing interventions, and advise in the development of new interventions with a goal of improving the test scores and outcomes for individual students with special needs.

Educational Excellence also implies that ACPS will have a culture of continuous improvement. In order to improve, ACPS must become more “data-driven.” The committee wants to ensure the special education programs have defined outcomes that are appropriate and measurable. To accomplish this, the SEAC will work with staff to ensure that ACPS Special Education data, especially reading and math scores, are available on the ACPS dashboard so that public accountability will aid in driving performance. The SEAC will work with ACPS staff to identify by the end of the year a set of appropriate, accurate and meaningful data to publicly share and track.

The SEAC will advise on the issues of disproportionality and educational equity. We will urge the School Board to identify the root causes of over-identification of minorities for special education services and the inappropriate lowering of standards for and expectations of students with disabilities.

The SEAC will continue to advocate, especially during budget planning, for training, resources and supports necessary to ensure that special education teachers, in particular, have the tools they need to provide appropriate and effective differentiated education.

Trust is the key to bringing about the cultural change necessary for ACPS to become a truly inclusive organization. The SEAC will work to promote an inclusive culture across all of ACPS so that all may work and learn in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

The SEAC interprets the district objectives related to civic engagement, civic responsibility, ethics and behaviors for success in the broadest sense. The SEAC will urge the administration to move beyond the goals of inclusion and acceptance and create instead an organizational culture that promotes human dignity and the presumption of competence.

This work on the part of the Special Education Advisory Committee aligns with the ACPS 2020 Goal #1:

**Academic Excellence and Educational Equity:
Every student will be academically successful and prepared for life, work and college.**

Through its members, the SEAC has strong ties to a wide network of social service organizations and community organizations. The SEAC will seek to leverage these relationships on behalf of ACPS by first identifying and understanding the existing relationships and by identifying opportunities for collaborative partnerships.

Each year members of the SEAC work to increase awareness of disabilities and promote inclusion through PTA and parent initiated programs in the schools. This year we will make recommendations to implement a district wide formal approach to disability awareness designed to spread beyond the walls of the school so that the broader community understands the contributions made by students with disabilities. The SEAC will urge the public relations and media specialists within ACPS to highlight students with disabilities with greater frequency.

The SEAC will make recommendations, as needed, to improve the reach and efficacy of the Parent Resource Center.

This work on the part of the Special Education Advisory Committee aligns with the ACPS 2020 Goal #2:

**Family and Community Engagement:
ACPS will partner with families and the community in the education of Alexandria's youth.**

The SEAC will analyze the data related to recruitment and retention rates of special education teachers, para professionals, therapists and other support personnel who work directly with students with disabilities. The SEAC will also examine the pay scales of these professionals relative to surrounding districts and make appropriate recommendations.

The SEAC will seek to highlight and celebrate instructional excellence and inclusive practices by improving the Harry Burke and Anne Lipnick Education Awards nomination process; restructuring the awards if appropriate, and modifying the selection criteria if necessary. The SEAC will also renew its commitment to elevate the award ceremony to command district wide attention for award recipients.

The SEAC will highlight the need to have an effective professional development track for special education professionals within the district with the goal of improved retention of quality special education professionals. The committee will receive an annual report on professional development and provide comment on the report.

This work on the part of the Special Education Advisory Committee aligns with the ACPS 2020 Goal #3:

**An Exemplary Staff:
ACPS will recruit, develop, support, and retain a staff that meets the needs of every student.**

In an effort to understand the current state of special education learning environments, SEAC members will survey at least four existing facilities, including off site training facilities, and make recommendations, based upon the best principles of universal design, for board consideration as ACPS implements its Redistricting and Capital Improvement Plans.

Safe and secure facilities are of particular importance for vulnerable populations. The SEAC will continue to report any compliance issues to ACPS staff when students with disabilities face challenges related to access, transportation, and basic human dignity.

This work on the part of the Special Education Advisory Committee aligns with the ACPS 2020 Goal #4:

**Facilities and Learning Environment:
ACPS will provide optimal and equitable learning environments.**

The SEAC applauds the commitment made this year to introduce in September 2017, an adapted Family Life Curriculum for students with severe disabilities in all schools. This year the SEAC will follow the progress closely and will provide comment and make recommendations on the Family Life Curriculum.

Recognizing that physical, social and emotional health are priority issues for students with disabilities and that this population also needs to have the experience, relationships and access to physical fitness, recreation and play that all students need, the SEAC will advocate for additional support for adaptive PE and for increased collaboration with programs providing opportunities for social and psychological success. Programs like Best Buddies, adaptive and inclusive sports teams, opportunities for social engagement with typical peers, and an environment that presumes competence are all important components in the life of a healthy student.

The SEAC will continue to focus on the long-term success of special education students. Successful transitions and career readiness will always be a priority for the committee. The committee will work to push appropriate career and transition activities and discussions first into middle school and then into the earlier grades so that students and their families can fully benefit from the supports and options available to them. To this end, all middle school students should be provided opportunities beginning in sixth grade to target the specific skill development necessary for competitive employment. The SEAC will work with staff to establish a timeline by the end of the year to accomplish this goal of making this a reality.

This work on the part of the Special Education Advisory Committee aligns with the ACPS 2020 Goal #5:

**Health and Wellness:
ACPS will promote efforts to enable students to be healthy and ready to learn.**

Special Education students benefit exponentially from the efficient and timely implementation of academic interventions and accommodations, therefore the SEAC supports all efforts to make delivery of services more efficient and effective. The committee will continue to monitor and make recommendations as needed on all Special Education plans, programs and the implementation of those plans and programs.

The SEAC will also update the committee bylaws and bring them into alignment with current operating procedures, while being compliant to all Virginia guidelines.

The SEAC will provide input to the school board on the annual budget and its impact on children with disabilities.

The SEAC will make recommendations to the ACPS staff related to improving communication with all parents of children with special needs and students who are identified as possibly qualifying for an IEP.

This work on the part of the Special Education Advisory Committee aligns with the ACPS 2020 Goal #6:

**Goal Effective and Efficient Operations:
ACPS will be efficient, effective and transparent in its business operations.**

RECOMMENDATION: Approval

IMPACT: Proposed objectives for the 2016-17 year.



vision

All students with disabilities achieve their potential and actively contribute to our local and global communities.



mission

The purpose of this committee, in accordance with and subject to guidelines and regulations of the authorities of the Commonwealth of Virginia Administrative Code, Virginia Department of Education, Alexandria City School Board, and the SEAC Bylaws; shall be to provide advice and policy guidance concerning students with disabilities to members of the Alexandria City School Board.



objectives

SEAC will work with ACPS staff to identify by the end of the year a set of appropriate, accurate and meaningful data, especially data related to reading and math progress, to publicly share and track.

SEAC will actively engage in the Specialized Education Evaluation process to ensure that the parental voice is heard.

SEAC will advocate for training, resources, and supports necessary to ensure that special education teachers have the tools they need to provide appropriate and effective differentiated education.

SEAC will make recommendations to implement a district wide disability awareness program.

SEAC will urge the public relations and media specialists within ACPS to highlight students with disabilities with greater frequency.

SEAC will review recruitment, retention, and pay rates of special education teachers, para professionals, therapists and other personnel who work directly with students with disabilities.

SEAC will review the Harry Burke and Anne Lipnick Education Awards nomination process; restructuring the awards if appropriate, and modifying the selection criteria if necessary

SEAC members will survey existing facilities and make recommendations, based upon principles of universal design, for board consideration as ACPS implements its Redistricting and Capital Improvement Plans.

SEAC will provide comment and make recommendations on the Family Life Curriculum.

SEAC will work with staff to establish a timeline for introducing career transition planning into the lower grades.

SEAC will also update the committee bylaws and bring them into alignment with current operating procedures, while being compliant to all Virginia state mandated guidelines.

SEAC will provide input to the school board on the annual budget and its impact on children with disabilities.

SEAC will make recommendations to the ACPS staff related to improving communication with parents of children with special needs and students who are identified as possibly qualifying for an IEP.
