

BOARD MEMO

Date: December 16, 2021

For ACTION ___

For INFORMATION x

Board Agenda: Yes x

No ___

FROM: Ad Hoc School Board Advisory Support Committee Members: Board Members
Dr. Michelle Rief, Jacinta Greene, Margaret Lorber, Heather Thornton

THROUGH: Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Meagan Alderton, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Ad Hoc Committee Report and Recommendations

ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

Goal 1: Systemic Alignment

Goal 3: Student Accessibility and Support

Goal 4: Strategic Resource Allocation

Goal 5: Family and Community Engagement

SY 2021-2022 FOCUS AREA:

Strategic Plan Implementation

FY 2022 BUDGET PRIORITY:

Implementation of 2025 Strategic Plan

SUMMARY

In March 2021, the Ad Hoc School Board Advisory Support Committee (“Ad Hoc Committee”) was formed to evaluate and strengthen the relationship between the School Board and its advisory committees. The Ad Hoc Committee reviewed past and current membership rosters, as well as School Board policies governing advisory committees. Through an online survey and in-person discussions at School Board meetings, the Ad Hoc Committee solicited feedback from advisory committee members to better serve students, staff, parents and the community.

KEY FINDINGS

Survey

- Overall, 56% (those who scored 8 or higher on the scale of 1-10) of survey respondents indicated they were highly likely to recommend service on an advisory committee to a friend or community member.
- 66% agreed that committee membership reflected the schools and community in terms of diversity and viewpoints.
- 82% agreed that all committee members were able to effectively contribute and have their voices heard.
- 25% were neutral on whether the School Board reviewed and valued committee work, while 15% held a negative view.
- While 85% agreed that the School Board member liaison provided sufficient support and guidance to advisory committees, nearly half of these respondents (41%) indicated “*somewhat agree.*”

Advisory Committee Chair/Staff Liaison Briefings to School Board

- **Athletic Hall of Fame (AHOF)** - Committee has made important strides in recent years at achieving a more equal representation of male/female committee members and inductees into the Hall of Fame. An important strategy for recruitment includes word-of-mouth and directly reaching out to prospective members. School Board members are encouraged to attend the annual induction ceremony, which has grown over the years.
- **Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)** - Committee is working to increase awareness of SEAC and seeks to recruit more secondary school parents. SEAC has formed subcommittees and welcomes more direction from and interaction with the Board. The former chair offered to restart “Special Education 101” training for School Board members and can provide pertinent research articles about specialized instruction if that is desirable. She also encouraged the School Board to advocate at the state level for maintaining the option of virtual meetings for advisory committees, which is more accommodating of parents with childcare needs.
- **Career and Technical Education (CTE)** - Committee is continuing its efforts to raise awareness about CTE course offerings and pathways, and will spend the upcoming year focused on updating the comprehensive local needs assessment. The committee will collaborate with the Industry Advisory Boards, which were formed as part of The High School Project, and is also interested in promoting CTE exposure in the elementary and middle school grades. One suggested idea was to strengthen the partnership between CTE and specialized instruction.
- **Budget Advisory Committee (BAC)** - This year the committee is focused on partnering with ACPS financial services and communications staff to increase community engagement on the budget. The committee also appreciates the opportunity to collaborate with the city’s

Budget and Fiscal Affairs Advisory Committee (BFAAC). BAC has four members presently and the chair requested help with recruitment. She suggested that each School Board member could designate one individual to serve on the committee similar to the city's process for BFAAC.

- **Talented and Gifted Advisory Committee (TAGAC)** - Committee is focused on updating the Local Plan, increasing awareness of the continuum of services, elevating student voice, and providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their abilities. The chair indicated that a key focus is to ensure each school has representation on the committee and shared that a return to in-person meetings has negatively impacted attendance.

AD HOC COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase two-way communication between the School Board and advisory committees.** This can be accomplished by adding "Reports from Advisory Committees" to School Board meeting agendas under "Communications and Addresses to the Board." Advisory committee chairs can be invited to sign up to speak during this time when their Annual Report and/or Scope of Work are on the Consent Calendar. School Board liaisons can also be invited to provide brief updates or announcements regarding advisory committees during this time.
- **Improve orientation process for advisory committee members.** Currently there is an annual meeting for advisory committee chairs. However, a biannual orientation for new and prospective committee members is needed. Feedback from the survey indicated that advisory committee members desire a better understanding of the following topics: structure of the advisory committees, how to run an effective meeting, training on Robert's Rules of Order and VA FOIA requirements, the role of School Board and staff liaisons, how committees can provide policy input to the board, and referral to relevant state resources. The orientation can also include an introduction to the ACPS website and Electronic School Board, how to sign up for division newsletters, where to find ACPS policies, and how to update the committee's website. The Advisory Committee Handbook also needs updating and should be provided to all new committee members.
- **Delineate administrative responsibilities for advisory committees.** The advisory committees require administrative support to be successful and it would be helpful to revisit and more clearly delineate who is responsible for certain administrative tasks. These include: vetting prospective members, onboarding new committee members, updating committee rosters, providing updated rosters to the School Board annually, updating advisory committee bylaws and webpages, etc. A one-page document or table delineating the responsibilities of the committee chair, School Board chair and clerk would be useful.
- **School Board members need to assist in the recruitment of advisory committee members.** Based on survey feedback, the majority of advisory committee members learned about the opportunity from another person. As community leaders and committee liaisons, School Board members are uniquely positioned to assist in the recruitment of prospective new committee members. Additionally, the formation of new advisory committees for the

Spanish and Amharic/Arabic Communities presents an opportunity to develop a pipeline of recruitment to diversify membership across all ACPS advisory committees.

- **Revive the School Health Advisory Board (SHAB).** SHAB has not met since January 2020 and currently has no chair. Some former SHAB members reported the committee struggled with clarity about its role and impact. SHAB’s bylaws state its purpose is “to assist with the development of health policies in the school division and the evaluation of the status of school health, health education, the school environment and health services.” Traditionally the Director of School Health Services has played a major role in SHAB and there has been recent turnover in this position. The Ad Hoc Committee discussed that many issues impacting the school division are health-related, including the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health concerns, indoor air quality, etc. The Ad Hoc Committee recommends reviving SHAB and including school nurses on the committee. An initial task could be to do a health needs assessment for the division.
- **The School Board should advocate at the state level for advisory committees to have the option to meet virtually.** Several committee chairs indicated that committee participation increased during the pandemic when committees were able to meet virtually. This was particularly helpful for parents whose childcare needs made attending in-person meetings difficult. Now that committees are required by law to meet in-person again, some are struggling to make quorum. Providing the option to meet virtually might help with this challenge and also increase the diversity of our committees. The School Board recently adopted this issue as one of our 2022 legislative positions and we should seek opportunities to advocate for this change.
- **Reconstitute Ad Hoc School Board Advisory Support Committee in January.** The Ad Hoc Committee is in agreement that there are a few additional tasks that could further strengthen the advisory committees. Once the newly-elected School Board is inducted in January, we recommend reconstituting the Ad Hoc Committee to work on the following items: review the policies governing the advisory committees (BCE, BCF, BCF-R, BCFD and BCFC), as well as the Advisory Committee Handbook, and recommend updates; determine next steps for the School Health Advisory Board (SHAB); and support the development of new advisory committees for the Spanish and Amharic/Arabic Communities.

BACKGROUND

The School Board appoints parents, community members, students and staff who bring a unique perspective on specific topics to its advisory committees. The committees meet throughout the school year and each provides a Scope of Work and Annual Report.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Ad Hoc School Board Advisory Support Committee recommends that the School Board accept the report and recommendations.

IMPACT:

The recommendations of the Ad Hoc School Board Advisory Support Committee will improve collaboration between the School Board and its advisory committees.

ATTACHMENTS:

School Board Advisory Committee Member Survey

REFERENCES:

None

CONTACT:

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