

February 2, 2018

Clerk of the School Board,
1340 Braddock Place,
Alexandria, VA 22314

Re: ACPS School Budget FY 2019

Dear Members of the Alexandria City School Board,

On behalf of the ACPS Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), we urge you to make funding for Alexandria City Public School special education supports and services a top priority when preparing the ACPS Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Combined Funds Operating Budget.

SEAC Budget Recommendations:

- 1. Set aside \$250,000 for Special Education Evaluation implementation.**
- 2. Transportation review to cut taxi cab usage and cross-city bussing.**
- 3. Move two FTE staff from IDEA Grant to Operating Budget.**

The SEAC Scope of Work document sent to the School Board in November lays out our priorities for the 2017-2018 academic year, all in the context with the approved ACPS 2020 plan. SEAC advocates for adequate training, resources and supports necessary to ensure that all ACPS school administrators, teachers, service providers, para professionals and Central office staff have the tools they need to provide appropriate and effective education to students receiving special education services.

For over ten years, SEAC has expressed concerns over the declining or stagnant passing rates of reading, math and other SOL area scores of ACPS students receiving special education or specialized instruction. Additionally, there has been a substantial gap of approximately 10 points or more between the SOL passing rates of ACPS' students with disabilities compared to students with disabilities in neighboring Northern Virginia public school districts. In addition to academic and instructional concerns, we would like to see a district-wide effort to improve ACPS culture to one that presumes competence, fosters mutual respect and recognizes that students with disabilities enrich our schools and communities.

In 2016, the SEAC requested the School Board commission a robust, "get to the root of" evaluation to fully assess the long-standing special education/specialized instruction student outcome problems and the culture of ACPS. We are pleased our much-needed request was granted. The independent special education evaluation began in the Fall of 2017 and was later expanded to include all ACPS schools. However, the full report detailing the results of the special education evaluation is not expected until June 2018. Given the state of current SOL scores and parents' concerns over special education services district-wide, we simply cannot have another year of ignoring the needs of students with disabilities simply because we do not have the final evaluation results in time for the budget process.

We encourage the School Board to set aside \$250,000.00 for FY 2019 to be used for implementation and accountability of the special education evaluation results. This figure is based on the estimated cost of two ACPS full time equivalent (FTE) positions necessary to monitor implementation of the special education evaluation, provide special education services and arrange for additional staff training and development.

Further, SEAC would also like to recommend a review of the transportation system dedicated to special education. We believe that there are efficiencies that could be made in connection with bus transportation cross-city and examining those students using cab services. Utilizing alternative transportation options, some that the school district already has at its disposal, will allow for a reduction in expenses and could increase student interaction and socialization. A complete review of the cross-city busing and cab usage as well as vehicle availability should be undertaken by our new ACPS Director of Transportation, Charles Stone and ACPS Executive Director of Specialized Instruction, Terry Werner. We are confident that you will find some savings while opening the door for more life skill development for our students.

Finally, SEAC advocates that the ACPS FTE positions on the federal IDEA grant be monitored so that, if grant funds are insufficient, FTE positions currently on the IDEA grant might be transferred to the operating budget. This is an issue that is brought up by SEAC each year. ACPS must be prepared for this inevitable situation.

We look forward to following the School Board budget proceedings and urge you to address these important issues. Please contact SEAC Chair, Janet Eissenstat at janet.eissenstat@gmail.com or SEAC Vice-Chair, Ellen Taverna at emtaverna@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Janet Eissenstat and Ellen Taverna