

Ellen Taverna
Remarks to ACPS School Board
February 8, 2018

My name is Ellen Taverna. I'm Vice-Chair of the ACPS Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) and I have a Kindergartener at Lyles-Crouch Traditional Academy. I'm here tonight to urge the Board to prioritize funding Alexandria City Public School (ACPS) special education supports and services when preparing the Fiscal Year 2019 Combined Funds Operating Budget.

I've expressed many of these budget recommendations I will address tonight in a letter SEAC's Chair, Janet Eisenstatt and I submitted to the School Board last week.

I, along with my fellow SEAC members, am so pleased that the School Board has commissioned a robust, independent evaluation to fully assess the long-standing special education student outcome problems and other systemic difficulties students with disabilities and their families have experienced in ACPS special education. Let me also take this opportunity to thank you for expanding the special education evaluation to include all Alexandria City public schools.

However, the full report detailing the results of the evaluation is not expected until later this year. Given the poor state of current SOL scores and students' and parents' concerns over special education services district-wide, we simply cannot have

another year of potentially disregarding 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 evaluation, provide special education services and arrange for additional staff training and development.

When considering our request to set aside funds to implement the special education evaluation, we ask that you please do not change the recommendation that occupational and physical therapist positions be converted from contract to FTE status. We have clear documentation that hiring contract service providers, in the past, has resulted in delays and disruptions of services to students with disabilities. Moving these FTE service provider positions back to contract services would not result in any noticeable cost savings and instead could hurt students receiving occupational and physical therapy services.

Further, SEAC would also recommend a review of the transportation system dedicated to special education. We believe that there are efficiencies that could be explored in connection with bus transportation cross-city and those students using cab services. Utilizing alternative transportation options, some that the school district already has at its disposal,

could allow for a reduction in expenses and an increase in student interaction and socialization.

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 has brought up by SEAC each year and ACPS must be prepared for this inevitable situation.

Thank you for considering our requests when preparing the FY 2019 Operating budget.