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**Minutes of Meeting
Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting
Date: March 15, 2023
Alexandria City High School Library**

Agenda

	Name	Role	Present	Not Present
SEAC Members				
	Rachel Dixon	Member	X	
	Cindy Hart	Member	X	
	Laura Fontaine	Teacher Member	X	
	Carolyn Meza	Member		X
	Ryann Morales	Member		X
	Jennifer Niccolls	Member	X (virtually)	
	Ruchir Narayan	Member	X	
	William E. Olson	Co-Secretary	X (virtually)	
	Kate Radt	Student Representative	X	
	Alexis Stackhouse	Member	X	
	Joyce Sullivan	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 (virtually)	
Other	Courtney Davis	PRC Liaison		X
	Janet Reese	PRC Liaison	X	

Former SEAC Chair Cindy Hart led the meeting because of Mr. Olson’s virtual attendance at the meeting. Ms. Hart convened the meeting at 7:03 PM.

Attendance: Ms. Hart took attendance as reflected above.

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Public Comments: There were no public comments.

Old Business and Action Items

A motion was made to approve the Minutes of the January 18, 2023, SEAC Meeting. Ms. Radt asked to amend the minutes to correct a typographical error in the Student Representative report. After being seconded, the motion carried to approve the Minutes of the January 18, 2023, SEAC Meeting, as amended, without objection.

A motion was made to approve the Minutes of the February 22, 2023, SEAC Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee Meeting. Ms. Sullivan asked to amend the minutes to state that the subcommittee discussed “improved access for classroom visits” as a potential area of focus of the subcommittee. After being seconded, the motion carried to approve the Minutes of the February 22, 2023, SEAC Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee Meeting, as amended, without objection.

A motion was made to approve the Minutes of the January 18, 2023, SEAC Equity and Inclusion Subcommittee Meeting. After being seconded, the motion carried without objection.

New Business and Reports

- **Reports**

- **Executive Director of Specialized Instruction**

Ms. Werner reported on ACPS’s draft Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) grant application/report to the Virginia Department of Education. Ms. Werner explained that the federal government, under IDEA, makes payments to school districts based on the district’s number of pupils with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) as of December 1. Mr. Werner reported that ACPS had 1,823 students with IEPs as of December 1, 2022. Each school district must submit a plan to the state department of education to qualify for its IEDA grant. Ms. Werner noted that ACPS received approximately \$3.8 million under IDEA in 2022. Mr. Werner further explained that ACPS receives IDEA funds under Section 619 (pre-school) and Section 611 (K-22).

Referring to the draft application/report, Ms. Werner noted that Tab 3, 2023-2024 Special Education in Location and Regional Jails (page 15 of the PDF attached to these minutes), references that APCS partners with the Alexandria Jail to provide special education services to

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eligible inmates of that facility. Ms. Werner noted that the next page of the draft application/report (page 16 of the PDF) described what ACPS did last year to implement special education services.

Ms. Werner stated that the next page of the draft application/report (page 17 of the PDF) is the Maintenance of Effort report. A school district can never decrease the amount spent on special education services. Mr. Werner noted that this page was blank in the draft because she was still waiting for financial information.

Ms. Werner noted that the next page of the draft application/report (page 18 of the PDF) contains information on Comprehensive Coordinated Early Intervening Services (CCEIS) and Proportionate Set Aside. She stated that ACPS has determined that it is disproportionately finding African American students as eligible for IEPs based on the emotional disturbance category and that ACPS has set aside 15 percent of Part B funds for CCEIS to address this issue. Ms. Werner explained that ACPS uses these funds for central office support to school teams to improve processes for identifying IEP eligible students. Ms. Werner noted that this page also reflects ACPS's proportionate set-aside of approximately \$120K to pay for a speech pathologist who provides services to students with IEPs whom parents had privately placed in private schools. Ms. Werner added that parents must bring the students to an ACPS facility to receive this speech service.

Ms. Werner noted that the page titled Proposed Grant Budget, Section 611 (page 21 of the PDF) contains information that identifies the majority of IEP funds that ACPS receives. She stated that of the Section 611 grant, ACPS uses \$3.2 million for salaries and benefits and the remaining \$104K for material and supplies. ACPS uses the salaries and benefits funds for most of the Central Office's Specialized Instruction positions. Referring to the page titled Proposed Grant Budget, Section 619 (page 25 of the PDF), Ms. Werner noted that ACPS uses the \$101K received under Section 619 to pay the salary and benefits of one early childhood special educator.

Ms. Hart asked about how long ACPS would remain under the CCEIS. Ms. Werner responded that this is the fourth year under the CCEIS and that ACPS will remain under it until it no longer has a disproportionate number of African American students eligible for an IEP under the emotional disturbance category. Ms. Werner stated that ACPS will likely remain disproportionate until the current IEP eligible students under the emotional disturbance category

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matriculate out of the system. Ms. Werner said that ACPS is working to reduce new findings of African American students as IEP eligible under the emotional disturbance category. Ms. Werner said that ACPS will have new data in March on students who are IEP eligible under the emotional disturbance category.

Ms. Alderton noted that changes in the school culture is important to address this issue. Ms. Werner said that ACPS, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, conducted multiple brown-bag trainings with experts to help address the process of identifying students for IEP eligibility based on emotional disturbance. Ms. Werner added that in the last two years ACPS has been focused on the IEP referral process in schools that appear to refer African American students for IEP eligibility assessments based on the emotional disturbance category at the highest rate. Ms. Werner noted that ACPS staff of color had not been referring African American students for IEP eligibility assessments based on the emotional disturbance category.

Ms. Alderton asked about ACPS growing its transition programs for students with disabilities. Ms. Werner responded that ACPS added another transition position this year. She noted that ACPS has: (1) focused on providing transition support for post-school and college transition, including life skills, and (2) expanding transitional support to middle school students. When asked about Project Search, Ms. Werner stated that Project Search is a national program for students with disabilities in their final year of IEP eligibility. Project Search provides job experience, including vocational opportunities, and job placement services. Ms. Werner noted that ACPS did not participate in Project Search this year because it did not have enough eligible students. Ms. Werner added that ACPS still partners with INOVA.

Ms. Hart asked about SEAC publicizing ACPS's IDEA grant submission to parents and guardians of ACPS students with disabilities. Ms. Werner stated that she defers to Ms. Reese on that question. Ms. Reese stated that parents and guardians having never asked about ACPS's IDEA grant application. Ms. Reese stated that parents and guardians are generally focused on their own children and are not concerned about staffing issues unless their own children are affected by a lack of staff. Ms. Reese stated that she did not think publicizing ACPS's IDEA grant application to parents and guardians should be an area of focus.

Ms. Alderton noted that it is important for people to see that IDEA is essentially an unfunded mandate. Ms. Werner stated that she believed that ACPS receives approximately \$438 per student with disabilities under IDEA compared with ACPS's total expenditures of

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approximately \$32K per student with disabilities. Ms. Werner added that she submits a memorandum with a general overview of the IDEA grant applications to the School Board that is posted publicly.

With respect to the issue of the disproportion of students with IEP eligibility based on emotional disturbance being African American, Ms. Stackhouse noted that she is not concerned about who is making the referrals but rather whether such students are being properly identified. Ms. Werner noted that such students are being referred for evaluation for IEP eligibility based on emotional disturbance because of classroom behavioral issues. She explained that when such referrals occur, there is a child study meeting to discuss the student and that the emotional disturbance category is identified in the child study meetings. Ms. Zissios added that some staff interacting with students with some behavioral challenges may not have experiences with students with such issues and ACPS has offered professional development to support staff further in this area. Ms. Werner explained that ACPS has used the CCEIS funds to focus on providing coaching and modeling at particular schools. Ms. Alderton stated that the emotional disturbance and learning disability categories are nuanced and can lead to different interpretations when assessing eligibility.

With respect to identifying student for child study, Ms. Werner noted that a student should not be referred unless six to eight weeks of data has been gathered. Ms. Werner stated that up to 90 percent of the time, there have not been pre-interventions before IEP referrals. It was noted that implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) in connection with intervention for students with social-emotional issues is important. Ms. Alderton agreed that pre-screening of students remains a problem. Ms. Werner added Student Services' involvement in the process is important and that ACPS has made strides on this issue. Ms. Werner noted that SEAC could address, in its end-of-year report, MTSS in connection with intervention for students with social-emotional issues. Ms. Werner also noted that staff turnover has presented challenges in this area.

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○ School Board Liaison

Ms. Alderton noted that the School Board and the City Council is reaching the end of the budgeting process. She noted that there appears to be no issue with the City Council approving the Board's combined funds budget request. Ms. Alderton stated that the Board may have to adjust its Capital Improvement Funds Budget request.

Ms. Van-Pelt asked about the budget request for space for the Chance for Change program. Ms. Werner noted that the Chance for Change program generally does not serve students with disabilities. Ms. Alderton added that the Chance for Change program could be improved and expanded. The program could improve its programming with better space. Ms. Alderton stated that the City Manager said that he did not want to fund the space build-out for Chance for Change on floors 5 and 6 of the Ferdinand T. Day school building. Ms. Werner added that Parent Resource Center was supposed to be relocated to floors 5 and 6 of the Ferdinand T. Day school building upon completion of the Minnie Howard re-build. Ms. Alderton stated that she would have preferred the City Manager to have identified the Capital Improvement Funds it would receive and allowed the School Board to determine how to allocate those funds. Ms. Alderton stated that the School Board will be receiving an update on the key performance indicators for the ACPS Strategic Plan and that she was excited about receiving that data. Ms. Van-Pelt stated that the City Council has a community listening session on the budget scheduled for Saturday March 18, 2023.

Ms. Stackhouse asked about the status of the decision-making about School Resource Officers (SROs) in schools. Ms. Alderton responded that the School & Law Enforcement Partnership (SLEP) advisory group recommended that SROs remain in school. Ms. Werner added that the School Board is voting on installing weapons abatement systems. Ms. Alderton said that a new Memorandum of Understanding between the School Board and the Alexandria Police Department needs to be negotiated and will be presented to the School Board in April 2023.

○ Parent Resource Center

Ms. Reese stated she has spent a lot of time collaborating with Amy Creed on the Transition Fair scheduled for May 17 for students with IEPs at the middle and high school levels and their families. Ms. Reese said 12 vendors from various support organizations are scheduled

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to attend the Transition Fair. Ms. Resse added that two sessions of workshops will take place during the evening of the Transition Fair. Ms. Reese had been working on arranging sufficient interpreters for the Transition Fair. She noted that one-fourth of students with disabilities speak Spanish as their primary language. Ms. Reese observed that the Transition Fair was a successful event last year.

Ms. Reese added that the PRC has conducted 19 workshops and webinars this year. Some of the workshops and webinars covered general topics while others were targeted to particular schools or groups. Ms. Reese noted that she has presented to the monthly Amharic parent group including a presentation on March 14, 2023, on Medicaid waivers.

Ms. Reese also noted that her goal this school year is to provide more support to families with students with disabilities in the city-wide classrooms. Ms. Van-Pelt asked about the focus of concern about the city-wide classrooms. Ms. Reese said it was important for families with students in city-wide classrooms to be aware of issues such as: (1) Medicaid waiver, (2) legal authority to make decisions for children, and (3) looking at SSI support.

Ms. Sullivan asked about how parents and guardians can find out about what the PRC does. Ms. Reese said informing parents and guardians remains a challenge. ACPS is supposed to provide information on the PRC at IEP meetings. SEAC members noted that it had not been their experience to receive information on the PRC. Ms. Werner said she would follow-up on this issue.

Ms. Reese added that the Transition Fair is scheduled to take place on May 17, 2023 at Alexandria City High School starting with vendors on the patio between the building and the parking garage. The workshop sessions are scheduled for 6:30 PM to 7:10 PM and 7:20 PM and 8:00 PM.

On providing notice to parents about PRC, Ms. Reese said that the PRC likes reviewing draft IEPs with parents and guardians prior to the IEP meeting. Ms. Hart noted that at one point a SEAC flier was distributed at IEP meetings.

Ms. Reese stated that she presented to the Alexandria Council of PTAs (PTAC) and her presentation led to a couple of presentations to school level PTAs. Ms. Reese noted that there has been a lot of turnover within PTAs. Ms. Werner added that she presented to special education subcommittee of PTAC and that Ms. Hart had attended that meeting.

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In response to a question about how the PRC sends out information to families, Ms. Reese said that the PRC uses ParentSquare. In response to Ms. Van-Pelt's comment about the difficulties in using ParentSquare, Ms. Reese said that the PRC was not given the option to continue e-mail distribution through mail chimp. Mr. Narayan asked if all families with children with IEPs or 504 plans could be designated in ParentSquare as "opting-in" to messages from the PRC. Ms. Reese said that the PRC cannot control who "opts-in" to its messages in ParentSquare.

- **Teacher Representative**

Ms. Fontaine noted that the discussion at the February 22, 2023, SEAC Equity and Inclusion subcommittee meeting about the benefits of special education focused back-to-school night. Ms. Werner noted that ACPS holds an orientation for students with disabilities transitioning from one school level to another. With respect to back-to-school night, Ms. Werner noted that it would be difficult to replicate back to school night on another night for students with disabilities who generally attend general education classes. Ms. Werner said the back-to-school night offering for citywide classrooms could be examined. Ms. Zissios noted that she conducts a separate orientation night for parents via Zoom a week before the back-to-school open house night at Lyles Crouch.

Ms. Reese noted that there are often no parents or guardians at back-to-school night for city-wide classrooms because of the difficulty in finding child care or because the back-to-school night is at the same time as a sibling's back-to-school night. Ms. Reese added a new event may need to cover the special education population as a whole. Mr. Narayan discussed the scheduled Jefferson-Houston special education fair and that the SEAC Equity and Inclusion subcommittee had discussed scaling up that program.

- **Student Representative**

Ms. Radt expressed concerns about students with disabilities being discouraged from using available accommodations during standardized testing such the SATs, PSATs, and AP examinations. Ms. Radt provided specific examples including: (1) a history AP proctor stating that a student could not use the student's accommodation extra-time, (2) a student was not

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provided an allowed for “stop-the-clock” accommodation during the PSAT, and (3) a time and a half accommodation not being provided.

Mr. Narayan asked if after-to-school transportation for students with disabilities had improved. Ms. Radt did not have an update on that issue.

- **Future of the Anne R. Lipnick Awards**

Ms. Zissos opened the discussion about the Anne R. Lipnick Awards by describing the Vision, Integrity, and Passion (VIP) awards that can be awarded to school staff and the possibility of the VIP awards supplanting the need for the Anne R. Lipnick Awards.

Ms. Werner then provided background on discussions about the continued need for the Anne R. Lipnick Awards. She noted that school staff pushed back on the Anne R. Lipnick Awards nominating process last year because there was a perception that everyone went above and beyond last year. SEAC did undertake a nomination process for the Anne R. Lipnick Awards last year but only received four to five total nominations which were insufficient for making awards selections.

To assess whether to undertake Anne R. Lipnick Awards nominating process this year, Ms. Werner noted that SEAC had asked her to inquire with the principals about their support for the awards. Ms. Werner initially received no response. Ms. Werner then noted that she asked again at the administrators meeting that Ms. Zissos had referenced at the beginning of the discussion and did not hear support from the administrators for the Anne R. Lipnick Awards. Ms. Werner stated that the administrators noted that the VIP awards are given at more frequent intervals than the Anne R. Lipnick Awards and the administrators expressed concern about pulling out staff who serve students with disabilities for special recognition. Ms. Werner also noted that the VIP awards are perceived as a less burdensome mechanism and can be used to recognize a larger number of staff.

Ms. Van-Pelt expressed concerns about principals dictating what SEAC does with respect to the Anne R. Lipnick Awards. There was a consensus among SEAC to not proceed with Anne R. Lipnick Award nominations for this year but to re-visit the future of the awards next year.

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- **2023-2024 SEAC officer elections / nominating committee**

Ms. Hart and Mr. Olson discussed the process for nominating SEAC officers for the 2023-2024 school year. Ms. Fontaine and Mr. Olson agreed to serve on the SEAC nominating sub-committee.

- **Presentation to the School Board on May 4, 2023**

Mr. Olson explained that the School Board has invited SEAC to present about its work at the May 4, 2023 School Board Meeting. Mr. Olson stated that he was told that SEAC is allotted around five minutes for the presentation.

SEAC members discussed the May 4, 2023, presentation. Potential items to cover could include MTSS for students experiencing social-emotional issues, teacher retention and open positions, and the issues being evaluated by the SEAC Equity and Inclusion Sub-Committee. The committee discussed circulating a Google Doc to help plan for the presentation.

Future Business

None.

Announcements

Mr. Olson announced that Ms. Meza had submitted her resignation from SEAC on March 15, 2023, and that Mr. Olson had submitted Ms. Meza's resignation to the School Board for approval.

Ms. Hart adjourned the meeting at 8:55 PM.

Next Meeting: May 31, 2023