

Alexandria City Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting
February 12, 2018
7:00 pm
T.C. Williams
Media Center

Draft Meeting Minutes

Call to Order: 7:06 pm

Introductions

In attendance: Ellen Taverna, Deanne McNulty, Lisa Allison-Lee, Janet Reese, Margaret Lorber, Coral Childs, Maeve O'Connor, Courtney Davis, Vaughn Jordan, and members of the community

Public Comments

MindSpec: Informatics for Neurodevelopmental Disorders

Dana Patterson presented information and answered questions about MindSpec (<http://www.mindspec.org/>) a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization advancing research on neurodevelopmental conditions. Founded in 2006, MindSpec hopes to facilitate the discovery of a cure for autism. Eventually, they hope to expand their research to other types of neuropsychiatric illness. The recently opened Autism Reading Room (<http://readingroom.mindspec.org/>) gives accurate autism information without the jargon of scientific publications. We focus on facts, not opinion, to assist families in understanding their diagnosis and to promote public understanding of the brain. MindSpec is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization.

ACPS Parent

Jeff Zack, former SEAC Chair and parent of a child with dyslexia and an ACPS IEP, spoke to the committee about the current situation with his son's education and its shortcomings. Fidelity to the plan, consistency in administering the plan, and accountability in administering the plan are key concerns. He asked if the committee had any suggestions on how his family should proceed. We discussed the different types of curriculum available to support students with dyslexia in ACPS. Suggestions included putting EVERYTHING in writing and contacting the ACPS Office of Compliance.

Comments from Principal

Ingrid Bynum, Patrick Henry Elementary School, faces challenges with a constantly shifting school population. It is not unusual for students to leave midyear and then return to the school after several months. Consistency is key and special education is customized as much as possible. The special education staff is directly accountable to the principal. She is working with other schools to ease

transition from elementary to middle school and transitions from one elementary school to another. Members asked Principal Bynum to communicate to other principals to remind staff that IEP meetings are not routine for the family, parents should be made aware of the Parent Resource Center, parents should be better included in the IEP process, and that draft IEPs should be provided earlier.

Main Agenda Topics

Discussion with Paul Patterson, Arlington SEAC Chair

Paul Patterson led a discussion on the Arlington SEAC. Parents in Arlington routinely make public comments to the school board as a group. Solving individual issues does not solve systemic issues.

Arlington County Public Schools did a school district wide evaluation of special education 6 years ago, similar to the one proposed for Alexandria. The Arlington SEAC drafted the request for proposal (RFP), not the school administration. The contractor reported to a board consisting of SEAC members and school administrators from special education and contracting. The evaluation sampled IEPs from every school in Arlington and met with panels of parents.

SEAC saw the draft report before it was final and members were able to comment on and edit the report. Out of six recommendations, three have been executed. Fidelity to, consistency in and accountability for IEPs continues to be a problem. Looking back, more of the parent panel discussions should have made it into the recommendations. A new request for proposal (RFP) is being drafted for a follow up evaluation.

Arlington County Public Schools are currently developing a strategic plan. Arlington SEAC is part of the development process. Of special concern is the use for new H-B Woodlawn Secondary School to open in 2019.

Special education is integrated with the Office of Instruction in Arlington County Public Schools. SEAC recommendations roll up to the school board through an advisory committee on instruction, which seems to give them more “weight”.

Arlington also has a Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA). SEPTA routinely reports at PTA meetings and many parents support both groups.

Vote on SEAC Secretary

Coral Childs was nominated and elected.

ACPS Budget

SEAC has created the following statement to focus the school board on the needs of our students with special needs.

“The ACPS Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) advocates that the ACPS full time equivalent (FTE) positions on the federal IDEA grant be monitored so that, if need be, necessary positions be transferred to the operating budget.

We also advocate that there be set aside \$250,000.00 to be used for implementation and accountability of the 2017-2018 ACPS special education evaluation results.

Finally, we would also like to recommend a review of the ACPS transportation system dedicated to students with disabilities. We believe that there are efficiencies that could be made to cut the expense and allow for increased student interaction and socialization.”

It is recommended that SEAC members meet with all school board members to discuss the specific needs of the Department of Specialized Instruction and request funding to provide service to our population.

Special Education Awards Update

The award ceremony will be held on May 24th in conjunction with a school board meeting. The awards are as follows:

- One award for the outstanding K-12 special education teacher or related service provider
- One award for a K-12 general education teacher who demonstrates outstanding inclusionary practices
- One award for the outstanding special education para professional

Inclusion Project Grant/Disability Awareness

SEAC has applied for a grant to fund the Inclusion Project. We will use grant funds to plan a disability awareness event for children at Del Ray’s Art on the Avenue. It would be similar to the 2017 Art on the Avenue event last October and we will need to recruit more ACPS students to help with the planning and volunteer on the day of the event.

Vote and Approval of January Meeting Minutes.

Next SEAC Meeting – March 12th

Adjournment: 9:12 pm