

**Special Education Advisory Committee
Alexandria City Public Schools**

To: Alexandria City Public School Board

**From: Janet Reese, SEAC Co-Chair
Janet Eissenstatt, SEAC Co-Chair**

Date: November 19, 2012

Re: SEAC Scope of Work 2012-13

At the October 23, 2012 meeting of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), committee members identified four key areas as its scope of work for the 2012-13 School Year. Committee members voted unanimously to focus on the following areas of concern related to Alexandria's students with disabilities:

- District-wide Consistency in IEP Development and Implementation
- Career and Secondary Transition
- Curriculum Amendments to Improve Outcomes for Students with Executive Function Disorders
- Use of Assistive Technology/Augmentative Communication

Each of these issues is in alignment with the School Board Strategic Plan, and each is an area of long-standing concern to parents of children with disabilities and the professionals who work with them. As in previous years, SEAC will focus on developing and presenting specific, actionable recommendations. We will address our scope of work as follows:

District-wide Consistency in IEP Development and Implementation

Parents throughout ACPS continue to voice concern and frustration over the inconsistent or inadequate development and implementation of IEPs. Consequently, SEAC's focus on IEPs will be two-pronged: the development of appropriate IEPs with meaningful and measurable goals easily understood by parents and staff; and their legally compliant implementation with fidelity and division-wide consistency of service. To that end, SEAC underscores the need for principal involvement in the development and implementation of each IEP in his or her school and requests that principals:

1. support continued staff efforts to review IEPs and to collect data;
2. communicate with the Director of Special Education regarding patterns of parental complaints and establish targeted principal/school/individual staff member training accordingly.
3. improve the quality and regularity of parental participation in the IEP process through analysis of communication methods with parents, examination of obstacles and tracking of parental attendance; and
4. increase the involvement of students participating in/leading their IEP meetings beginning at an early age, as recommended by the Career and Secondary Transition Plan.

While parental involvement in the IEP process is desirable, SEAC members would like to emphasize that every IEP written and implemented within the school division must be of the highest possible quality, in order to meet the needs of every students with disabilities. This standard of high quality must be achieved, regardless of whether a parent participates in the IEP process or in the monitoring of its implementation.

Career and Secondary Transition

In June of 2012, SEAC received the Plan for the Continuous Improvement of Career and Transition Services and Supports from a work group comprised, in part, by some SEAC members. The work group recognized that preparation for careers following high school or higher education for students with disabilities must start, at a minimum, in middle school. SEAC urges the School Board to adopt and facilitate this important project. Implementing this far-sighted objective is of paramount concern, as we seek to set goals that push well beyond current, limited expectations for students with disabilities. Our goal is to prepare students with disabilities to find meaningful work or to receive higher education, so that they, like their typical peers, can grow into contributing members of society. In addition, we request the assistance of the School Board in forging alliances with the City Council and community leaders to encourage their cooperation and participation in creating internships and employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

Curriculum Amendments to Improve Outcomes for Students with Executive Function Disorders

As of February, 2012, approximately 1000 students in ACPS, or roughly eight percent of the student population, had been identified as having potential problems with executive function. It is reasonable to expect that number to increase, as the population of the school division grows. In order to improve outcomes for students with Executive Function Disorders, SEAC members will help identify strategies with documented success in supporting students with Executive Function Disorders for inclusion in the 2014 curriculum.

Use of Assistive Technology/Augmentative Communication

The availability of different forms of assistive technology and augmentative communication devices and strategies has doubled in the last ten years, with some estimates describing the existence of over 40,000 different products. In order to capture the extraordinary learning and communication opportunities in the most time-efficient and cost-effective manners, SEAC members intend to work closely with ACPS staff to:

1. Assess what assistive technology/augmentative communication devices are currently available to ACPS students and in what capacity;
2. Analyze and prioritize unmet needs;
3. Support continued staff and parent training through the Parent Resource Center and community organizations;
4. Develop budget recommendations related to staffing, purchase and maintenance of hard- and software in the 2014-15 school year.

CONCLUSION

As required, SEAC will devote one meeting each year to reviewing the annual ACPS report on special education before its submission to the Commonwealth of Virginia. In addition, SEAC will continue its ongoing monitoring of the Autism and Inclusion Plans and their implementation. We will also address other issues as they arise during the school year.

SEAC members are eager to work with both outgoing and incoming School Board members to support a successful and seamless transition in the coming year. We look forward to working closely with Superintendent Morton Sherman, Chief Academic Officer Gwen Carol Holmes, and Director of Special Education Jane Quenneville on these critical issues. We encourage ACPS Board members, staff and members of the public to attend SEAC meetings.