

Date: August 13, 2012  
For: Information  
Board Agenda: yes

FROM: Janet Reese and Nan Ryant, SEAC Co-Chairs

Through: Dr. GwenCarol Holmes, Chief Academic Officer

Through: Dr. Morton Sherman, Superintendent of Schools

To: The Honorable Sheryl Gorsuch, Chair, and Members of the Alexandria City Public Schools School Board

Copy: Dr. Jane Quenneville, Director of Special Education

Re: Annual Report of the ACPS Special Education Advisory Committee for the 2011-2012 School Year

At its first meeting of the 2011-2012 academic year on September 27, 2011, the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) unanimously adopted a scope of work to focus on three key areas: Career and Transition, Academic Support for Students with Executive Function Deficits, and Culture and Ownership, including Bullying. In addition to these three areas, SEAC continued to monitor the implementation of the Autism and Inclusion Plans at regularly scheduled intervals. Furthermore, SEAC collaborated with the Office of Student Services to formulate language to be incorporated into IEP forms regarding service providers.

### **Career and Transition**

Following the collaborative model established by the Autism and Inclusion Plans, SEAC formed a work group in January, 2012, comprised of parents, administrators, teachers, and community members to develop a plan for career and transition. The mission statement of the plan states its goal as one to "...improve post-secondary supports, employment opportunities, community business partnerships and self-advocacy skills for students with disabilities who are preparing for college, work and life after high school." The plan was presented to SEAC at its June 19, 2012, meeting. As with the Autism and Inclusion Plans, the work group will meet regularly to monitor the progress of the Plan's implementation. Crucial to the success of the plan is the continued development of partnerships between ACPS and the business community to create sufficient appropriate employment opportunities for students

with disabilities, professional learning, appropriate and approved staffing, building appropriate structures and supports into student schedules, accountability of educators and administrators and improving communication among stakeholders. SEAC anticipates an update on the plan at its October meeting.

### **Academic Supports for Students with Executive Function Deficits**

In addressing the issue of Executive Function Deficits, which has been identified in roughly eight percent of the current ACPS student population, SEAC invited middle and high school administrators, special educators, and school psychologists to contribute their ideas to the January 24, 2012, discussion. Subsequently, Dr. Holmes invited SEAC to collaborate with ACPS, and SEAC members proposed a number of strategies to be built into the curriculum, to better support students with Executive Function challenges, the needs of whom are currently largely unmet. The Office of Student Services will review the submissions from SEAC and report back to SEAC what will be included in the September, 2014 rewriting of the ACPS curriculum.

### **Culture and Accountability, Including Bullying**

The December 20, 2011, SEAC meeting featured a presentation on the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, a program which establishes clear consequences, reporting procedures and an environment of safety and accountability requiring the involvement of the entire school community. ACPS has been in the process of implementing the program. SEAC expects to be updated on the progress of its implementation in the fall of 2012.

### **Recommendations**

1. SEAC should continue to review the Career and Transition Report presented by ACPS Office of Student Services in June. The Plan, developed after an exhaustive review of the current services and practices, offers a model to begin addressing the concerns surrounding the school division's Career and Transition services for students with disabilities and for making much-needed changes. However, given the enormous range of challenges posed by the post-secondary needs of students with disabilities, the Plan does not address all needs. While appreciating the many hours put into developing the Plan, some members of SEAC feel that it still needs to be expanded in scope.
2. The School Board should continue to monitor progress related to the implementation of the Autism, Inclusion and Career and Transition Plans with

regularly scheduled reviews on a quarterly basis.

2. The Office of Student Services and the high school need to better collaborate and communicate for more effective and improved implementation of student transition activities.

3. Every effort should be made to require administrators to facilitate and encourage the participation of staff in the trainings that are an essential element of the success of the Autism, Inclusion and Career and Transition Plans and in the support of students with Executive Function deficits.

4. The successful Parent Engagement Training Series presented by the Parent Resource Center during the 2011-2012 Academic Year should continue.

### **Other Items of Discussion**

After much time and extensive discussion between SEAC members and ACPS staff, a collaborative effort resulted in the determination of specific language to be used in the IEP regarding the provider of special education services as well as the identification of specific service providers.

SEAC members also discussed the Success for All (SFA) reading curriculum with regard to its applicability to students with disabilities. Concerns have been raised that students whose IEPs specify the need for targeted adult support during reading instruction may not be getting it, due to the manner in which SFA is delivered in the classroom and staffing logistics. Special attention needs to be paid to guarantee that the IEPs of these students remain in compliance. In addition, care needs to be taken to adequately support those students with social skills deficits who struggle to work in a student group setting.

### **Ongoing Concern**

SEAC members acknowledge that the school division, as a whole, has made strides in the area of special education. Nevertheless, there is continuing grave concern among parents that IEPs are not universally and consistently implemented as written. There continues to be a culture within ACPS and among administrators and teachers that implementing the terms of a signed IEP is optional, rather than recognizing it as a legally binding document. The question has been raised by parents whether attorneys for ACPS need to meet with administrators to emphasize the legally binding nature of signed IEPs. SEAC would support such a meeting. There are other school divisions

where the administration's legal counsel meets annually at the beginning of the school year to review IEP implementation and the legal responsibility all have to do so. Implementation of IEPs will continue to be a topic of discussion and monitoring by SEAC in the upcoming school year.