

**SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE
2020-2021
ANNUAL REPORT**

The demands placed on school systems and their administrators, educators and parents during this year of pandemic have been enormous. The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) intentionally kept its Scope of Work limited, with outreach as an important function. We wanted to ensure that the School Board and Superintendent were aware of the experiences of Students with Disabilities (SWD) and their families, for these challenges were often significant. We also aimed to communicate to families that our advisory committee exists to inform the district about unmet needs in the education and support of SWD and to participate in creating priorities and strategies for addressing identified needs.

Meanwhile, we continued last year's Scope of Work focus on Communications from the District. This need was identified through input of SEAC members and through outreach to families of SWD during the summer of 2020.

Additionally, SEAC formed a subcommittee to provide feedback on the K-2 Literacy Initiative, aiming to ensure that the needs of SWD will be addressed as work on that important plan progresses.

As per usual, SEAC also reviewed the district's annual Budget and the Policies and Procedures that affect SWD. We were pleased to partner with the Executive Director of Specialized Instruction to administer the Anne R. Lipnick Awards for Specialized Instruction after a hiatus last year due to the state of emergency.

Below is an end-of year summary of the work and recommendations of the SEAC. In addition to the report provided here, the SEAC also shared feedback from families and from our meetings through Public Comment to the School Board and emails to its members as well as through our January SEAC meeting with the Superintendent, Dr. Gregory Hutchings.

We commend the efforts being made by School Board Chair Meagan Alderton to determine effective methods for the Advisory Committees to the School Board to provide feedback. Our committee wants to ensure that the voice of families of SWD is heard and that our recommendations are of assistance. We welcome the guidance of the School Board on the best approaches for sharing reports and recommendations in the future.

Report on SEAC Areas of Focus for 2020-21

Communication with Parents/Guardians of Students with Disabilities (SWD)

Background: The first two core values of Equity for All 2025 are for ACPS to be “welcoming” and “empowering.” For this to happen, strong communication with families is essential. Parents and guardians of SWD need additional information not

needed by the average family, especially in time of pandemic. Additionally, the State tasks SEAC with assisting the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services. Family and Community Engagement is one of the five goals of Equity for ALL 2025, and improving communication with families and the community is a necessary step in meeting this goal.

Priorities and Goals: SEAC will examine current practices regarding communication with parents and guardians in ACPS related to supports and services provided to SWD. SEAC will make recommendations to improve communications from the division to families and will determine how to best share the ACPS Students with Disabilities Action Plan with the ACPS community.

Commendations/Strengths: The Executive Director of Specialized Instruction, Terry Werner, provided a live Q&A for families in November which provided detailed answers to the many questions of parents and guardians. Ms. Werner also provided a lengthy written Q&A about return to in-person instruction for families of SWD this spring and has committed to a quarterly newsletter for families of SWD moving forward.

Recommendations for ACPS:

In this unusual year of pandemic, the communication needs for families of SWD have been high. While we anticipate a return to normalcy next year, the following communication efforts would benefit families of SWD:

- Quarterly newsletter from Executive Director of Specialized Instruction to families of SWD; Action Plan updates could be provided here
- Updated webpage for the Office of Specialized Instruction, to include the SPED Action Plan checklist with quarterly updates
- Dedicated section in ACPS Express for Families of SWD, if events occur which have an outsized impact on SWD, as did the pandemic
- Information about the Literacy curriculum and interventions in use (please see Literacy memo for further information)
- Guidance and tools for families of SWD to empower them to assist with their child's literacy development (please see Literacy memo for further information)

SEAC Outreach to the ACPS Community

Background: Family and community engagement is one of the five goals of Equity for All 2025, and three core values are to be “welcoming,” “empowering,” and “equity-focused.” SEAC is an advisory committee mandated by the State of Virginia to engage and empower families of SWD. Our committee needs input from a diversity of families within ACPS to gain awareness of systemic needs.

Visibility of SEAC among parents and caregivers in our district has long been low. Data from the 2019 VDOE report noted that almost half of elementary parents and 80% of

secondary parents were not aware of SEAC and/or meetings. Prior to this year, rarely did a parent, caregiver, teacher, or community member provide public comment at a meeting. Though reports by Public Consulting Group (completed October, 2018) and Virginia Department of Education (completed August, 2019) detail the needs of students with disabilities in ACPS, we must develop on-going means to learn about parent/caregiver (and staff) concerns. Just as ACPS wants to ensure that all students have equitable access to instruction that meets their needs, SEAC wants to ensure that parents and caregivers of SWD in all ACPS communities know they have a place to share their concerns.

Priorities and Goals: Increase public comment and create a diversity of membership that reflects the community. Work in collaboration with school PTAs, the PRC, and ACPS leaders to raise the awareness of SEAC among parents and caregivers of SWD and of staff serving this population. Implement practices that develop a sense of community and empower families and staff to share questions and concerns. Build a culture of cross-collaboration and trust that will help SEAC fulfill its roll of advising ACPS of needs in the education and support of children with disabilities.

Commendations/Strengths: The Coordinator of the Parent Resource Center, Courtney Davis, Ph. D, has been instrumental in connecting SEAC with non-English speaking communities and in connecting SEAC with the Family and Community Engagement Center. Along with Parent Support Specialist Janet Reese, she has guided and collaborated with SEAC in creation of print materials to publicize the SEAC to families of SWD.

Key Activities and Accomplishments of SEAC

- Created a SEAC flyer for distribution at all IEP meetings
- Identified SEAC members to serve as liaisons to each ACPS school
- Provided liaisons with questions for parents/guardians of SWD (including translations) for distribution in school newsletters and via PTA social media
- Met with groups of non-English speaking communities within ACPS to share an overview of SEAC
- Collaborated with PRC and FACE to create an infographic highlighting the role of SEAC for families of SWD
- Created a SEAC Facebook page; roll-out still needs to occur
- Increased Public Comment; five parents of SWD gave Public Comment this year compared with none from ACPS families last year. Many parents also used the SEAC email address to share their experiences with the SEAC Chair.

Recommendations:

- Update ACPS SEAC webpage, in coordination with SEAC leadership

Future Issues

- SEAC must continue outreach efforts to ensure awareness of needs throughout ACPS and to encourage a diversity of membership. Surveys or parent focus groups may assist in this effort.

Literacy

Background: Instructional Excellence is one of the five goals of the ACPS 2025 Strategic Plan. Within this goal, Equity for All 2025 identifies “implementing a consistent, high-impact approach to teaching literacy in all K-2 classrooms across the Division” as a Highlighted Action and gives several strategies for improving K-5 literacy. SEAC wants to ensure that consistent, high-impact approaches for literacy instruction are available to SWD. Data from VDOE shows that the SWD proficiency rate in ACPS for English/reading was 35.99% in 2018-19, which falls below the State target of 48%.

Goal: Review ACPS plan for K-2 literacy and MTSS implementation and make recommendations accordingly.

Commendations/Strengths: The SEAC would like to thank the K-2 Literacy team-- Elementary Literacy Instructional Specialist Dr. Carolyn Wooster, Elementary Literacy Coordinator Kimberly Schell, and Inclusion Instructional Specialist Nicole Barrion--for welcoming the input of the SEAC and for meeting with our Literacy Subcommittee, for presenting the Literacy Initiative to the full committee, and for providing a survey regarding literacy priorities to our membership. We would also like to thank Dr. Erin Stone for her presentation to SEAC on the city-wide classrooms in ACPS, which included an overview of literacy for those students.

Recommendations for ACPS:

Please see the attached memo for a full description of the SEAC K-2 Literacy Recommendations.

Policies and Procedures

Budget

Anne R. Lipnick Awards