

**Alexandria City Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) Meeting
TC Williams High School - 3330 King Street
Media Center**

**Monday, March 12, 2018
7:00 – 9:00 pm**

MINUTES

Call to Order – Janet Eissenstat

Introductions: Lisa Allison Lee, Dr. Lois Berlin, Laura Canetti, Coral Childs, Courtney Davis, Janet Eissenstat, Lauren Favreau, Paul George, Vaughn Jordan, Shanna Kennan, Margaret Lorber, Deanne McNulty, Dr. Terri Mazingo, Maeve O'Connor, Janet Reese, Sandra Strachan Vieira, Ellen Taverna, Terry Werner, Rene Paschal.

Public Comment - Shanna Kennan, National Down Syndrome Society, spoke on World Down Syndrome Day (WDSD), which is observed on March 21. On this day, people with Down syndrome and those who live and work with them throughout the world organize and participate in activities and events to raise public awareness and create a single global voice for advocating for the rights, inclusion and wellbeing of people with Down syndrome.

In this area, there will be a run (Racing for 3.21) from the U.S. Capitol to the United Nations in New York City March 19-21. There is also a virtual race online. There is more information at <https://www.ndss.org/>.

Comments from Acting Superintendent Dr. Lois Berlin – Dr. Berlin began her career in education as a special education teacher. She taught 5 years in Scotland, followed by 10 years at John Adams Elementary School. Later she became assistant principal at Cora Kelly Elementary School.

Dr. Berlin has concerns on how special education students are performing in Alexandria City Public Schools. She welcomes the special education study. However, she feels the problem is in how special education services are delivered, not in the budget available to support them. She

would like to reorganize the Office of Curriculum and Instruction to improve the delivery of special education.

Sandra Strachan Vieira asked for more detail on the proposed reorganization. Dr. Berlin believes specialized instruction should use the same curriculum as general education.

Janet Eissenstat asked why not all forms of specialized instruction (special education, ELL, TAG, 504's, etc.) are grouped together. She would also like to see other support staff (nurses, psychologists, speech therapists, etc.) included in the same office. According to Dr. Berlin, there is no reason to separate the different types of specialized instruction, other than tradition. However, she is not sure about including the other support staff that is hired at the school level, not the central office level.

Sandra Strachan Vieira commented that at one time the support staff was in the same office.

Ellen Taverna commented that schools implemented specialized instruction differently and asked that there be more standardization between schools. Dr. Berlin stated that ACPS needs a clear vision at the top and it needed to be clearly communicated to all school principals.

Lisa Allison Lee asked when Dr. Berlin was leaving, when Dr. Hutchings was starting, and what kind of transition plan was in place. She also suggested that ACPS consider working with surrounding school districts. Dr. Hutchings will begin in July 2018 and he already has a weekly teleconference with Dr. Berlin. She agreed that working with other schools was a good idea, but felt that it could be a challenge.

Ellen Taverna asked about the school budget, especially funds for implementing the special education study, and the odds of it being passed by the City Council. Dr. Berlin was not concerned about additional funds to implement the special education study.

Janet Eissenstat asked about core competencies, especially what is ACPS' core competency. In addition, what is Dr. Hutchings' vision for special education? Dr. Berlin said ACPS is very good at staff training and has strong leadership in most schools. However, ACPS has a problem with retention and they frequently train staff only to have them leave.

Dr. Mozingo added that ACPS was good at effectively implementing services providing tuition reimbursement to teachers. She agreed that retention was an issue. The cost of living in Alexandria drives many teachers away.

Sandra Strachan Vieira suggested adding a clause to the tuition reimbursement program requiring teachers who receive assistance stay a number of years. She also asked what data was available on where teachers who are leaving go. According to Dr. Mozingo, Virginia state law prohibits a requirement that employees who receive tuition assistance stay. Most are leaving the Northern Virginia area. Those who stay in the area are looking for a shorter commute.

Deanne McNulty asked how ACPS measures the success of special education graduates. Do they have the skills they need to be part of the community? Do they go to college? Do they stay in college? Do they have jobs? Do they keep jobs once they have them? According to Dr. Werner, ACPS only tracks special education students for one year after graduation re college and employment. Dr. Berlin added that the American Association of School Administrators tried to track this data several years ago and found it to be a very intensive effort.

Sandra Strachan Vieira commented that the federal government issued a report on this topic several years ago. According to Dr. Werner, ACPS was part of that study.

Deanne McNulty followed up with a question on how ACPS followed up with local businesses that offer internships to special education students. Dr. Berlin said the Office of Community Outreach and Partnerships arranged the internships and she would have to ask them.

Sandra Strachan Vieira commented that not all of the internships are offered to students with disabilities. Dr. Werner thought they were and will follow up on this.

Janet Eissenstat commented that ACPS does not think special education students are competent and that culture needs to change. It can be changed through disability awareness, accommodation, inclusion, and respect for diversity. ACPS is barely at the accommodation stage.

Sandra Strachan Vieira asked about the implementation and follow up for the special education study. Margaret Lorber agreed that follow up was key, pointing out that the Arlington County Public Schools special education study done several years ago is preparing for a second study. It is a continuous improvement process and needs to be part of the day-to-day operations with funding.

Janet Eissenstat believes there will be some revenue neutral recommendations, but other recommendations will require funding.

Presentation on ACPS Augmentative and Alternative Communications (AAC) Team - Laura Canetti and Lauren Favreau

The AAC Team's goal is to equip ACPS students with disabilities autonomy of communication so they can communicate when and where they want and to whomever they want. This is a relatively new team within ACPS. They spent their first year focused on procedures and forms. Their second year was spent on classroom arrangements/environments to build communication competence.

Using a model developed by Project Core (<http://www.project-core.com/>) the AAC Team puts assistive communication technology in the classroom and provides classroom support to teachers. ACPS teachers have been trained in implementing Project Core. Additional training is planned for teachers and other service providers.

Data collection is key to measuring the success of this program. The AAC Team has developed a student matrix to collect data each school year. The AAC Team currently supports 168 students in ACPS. Thirty of these student use high tech systems, 11 use medium tech systems, and 127 use paper based systems.

The AAC Team is working with the Parent Resource Center (PRC) to provide quarterly information sessions on Project Core and will do training specific the ACPS' needs. The team would also like to start a student club on AAC.

Janet Eissenstat is impressed that the program is implemented consistently across ACPS. How long does it take from identification of a child in need to

delivery of services? According to the AAC Team, it depends on the child but their goal is 55 days.

Sandra Strachan Vieira asked if the communications devices go home with the children. She also asked if all schools were using the paper-based system. The AAC Team provides training to parents and the devices go home if needed.

Dr. Werner added that her office is working with parents who have insurance that covers these devices on purchasing them for the home. All schools are using the paper-based system.

Janet Eissenstat asked if school software could be added to personally owned devices like iPad. Dr. Werner said there were licensing issues concerning ACPS software on personally owned devices.

Deanne McNulty asked if aftercare programs like Campagna and therapeutic recreation are using this system. According to the AAC Team, no, but they hope to expand it to those programs eventually.

Lisa Allison Lee asked if the AAC Team used the speech program available on the school issued Chromebooks. According to Dr. Werner, they have just started using it and will expand its use.

Comments from Principals – Paul George (Francis C. Hammond Middle School) and Randy Last Name? (Samuel Tucker Elementary School)

Paul George agreed with Dr. Berlin about breaking down “silos” between special education and general education, but pointed out that special education teachers also bring a valuable point of view to the table. Hammond frequently uses co-teaching and he wants to see both teachers teach, not one teaches while one provides support.

He would like to see more work done on transitioning students from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school. Hammond has started a “Best Buddies” program, which will run through the rest of the year.

Rene Paschal commented that the principals' meeting last month, with information from the Patrick Henry principal was very useful. He would like to improve communication with parents.

Maeve O'Connor asked who led the "Best Buddies" program at Hammond and what the reaction of the general education students had been. According to Paul George, a teacher leads the program with help from other teachers and counselors. The general education students have responded positively to the program.

Approval of February SEAC meeting and working session minutes – Motion to approve by Deanne McNulty, seconded by Maeve O'Connor. Motion passed unanimously.

Review of ACPS Budget process – Janet Eissenstat was at this evening's City Council meeting to support the proposed school budget, including funds for the special education study. Deanne McNulty stated that SEAC members needed to contact both City Council and School Board members asking them to support the school budget.

Special Education Awards update – Janet Eissenstat announced plans for an awards ceremony May 24 either before or during the School Board meeting. Susan Last Name? is working on an online nomination form.

SEAC Recruitment – Ellen Taverna will attend the April PTAC meeting and discuss the formation of a Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA) in ACPS. She will also try to recruit members for SEAC. There are currently five openings in SEAC (17 seats total). She asked members to reach out to other groups they work with that might be interested.

Inclusion Project mini-grant – Ellen Taverna announced that SEAC had received a \$2,000 mini grant from the Virginia Department of Education to fund the Art on the Avenue activities.

Report from the Director of Specialized Instruction – Dr. Terry Werner announced the evaluation team was finishing its data collection. The project is on schedule.

Deanne McNulty asked if Dr. Werner had followed up with Mr. Zack who voiced concerns at last month's meeting. Dr. Werner cannot speak about specific cases but she will be contacting Mr. Zack.

Report from the Parent Resource Committee – Janet Reese stated that there had been a session earlier on 504 plans. There is a session Wednesday evening on discipline policies for students with disabilities. Please register if you plan to attend.

In general, please register for any session you plan to attend. The PRC will cancel sessions if people do not sign up. If you have registered, the PRC can also contact you about cancellations.

Margaret Lorber commented that the 504 plan session was very informative.

Sandra Strachan Vieira asked that before the Wednesday night session, Dr. Werner make it clear that the speaker is an attorney for the school board. Dr. Werner agreed.

Adjournment – Janet Eissenstat