

Date: June 19, 2013
For: Information
Board Agenda:_____

FROM: Janet Reese and Janet Eissenstat, SEAC Co-Chairs

Through: Dr. GwenCarol Holmes, Chief Academic Officer

Through: Dr. Morton Sherman, Superintendent of Schools

To: The Honorable Karen Graf, 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 2012-2013 School Year

At its meeting on October 23, 2012, the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) unanimously adopted a scope of work for the 2012-2013 academic year to focus on four key areas: district-wide consistency in IEP development and implementation, career and secondary transition, curriculum amendments to improve outcomes for students with executive function disorders, and use of assistive technology and augmentative communication. In addition to these four areas, SEAC continued to monitor the implementation of the Autism and Inclusion Plans at regularly scheduled intervals.

District-wide Consistency in IEP Development and Implementation

In response to continued concern voiced by parents throughout the school division about the inconsistent and inadequate development and implementation of IEPs, SEAC focused on two major areas: 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 emphasize the need for principal involvement in the development and implementation of each IEP in his or her school, SEAC members invited elementary school administrators to attend the January 22, 2013, SEAC meeting. At that time, SEAC members and administrators discussed strategies for improving IEP development and implementation, and consequently, improving student outcomes, as well as increasing parental involvement in the IEP process. However, SEAC

members also underscored the need for every IEP written and implemented in the school division to be of the highest possible quality, in order to meet the needs of every student with a disability, regardless of whether a parent participates in the IEP process or in the monitoring of its implementation. SEAC members anticipate inviting secondary school administrators to participate in a similar discussion during the 2013-2014 academic year.

SEAC members have long requested that a principal's annual performance review be tied directly to special education and IEP implementation. SEAC members are pleased that the new principal evaluation form will specifically do so.

Career and Secondary Transition

Throughout the year, SEAC has monitored the implementation of the Career and Transition Plan as it was presented to SEAC in June, 2012. SEAC members are pleased that strides have been made in developing post-secondary employment and educational opportunities for students with disabilities through relationships with organizations such as Project Search, the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce and NOVA. Nevertheless, SEAC members cannot emphasize strongly enough the need for additional post-secondary employment opportunities for students with disabilities. It remains a matter of utmost urgency and paramount concern. It is imperative that partnerships between ACPS and the business community continue to develop, to create sufficient appropriate employment opportunities with the necessary supports, that students with disabilities continue to gain the self-advocacy skills needed to prepare for college, work and life after high school, as specified in the mission statement of the Plan, and that the professional learning, communication and administrative accountability crucial to the success of the Plan be in place. In addition, SEAC members request the continued assistance of Board members in forging relationships with the City Council and local business 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

At the May 28, 2013 meeting of SEAC, John Brown, ACPS Executive Director of Curriculum Design and Services, gave a presentation on executive function strategies and how they will be included in the new Curriculum 4.0. The objective is to improve achievement and enhance the skills of all students within the school division, not limiting efforts to the approximately eight percent of the students

within ACPS who have been identified as having potential executive function disorders. When implementing Curriculum 4.0, emphasis will be given to instructional behaviors to reinforce students' application of executive functions in the classroom, with use of strategies that promote students' executive functions in reading, writing and mathematics. Additional focus will be on promoting the social-emotional side of executive function skills. SEAC members applauded the idea of embedding executive function skills in the curriculum, as a means of benefitting all students, but caution that students with executive function disorders will need to have strategies reinforced repeatedly, in order to internalize them. SEAC members look forward to seeing the practical implementation of this plan to bolster executive functions. Accordingly, SEAC will request regular periodic reports on teacher training in the strategies suggested, in anticipation of Curriculum 4.0, and will monitor the implementation of the strategies, once the new curriculum is in place in the fall of 2014.

Use of Assistive Technology/Augmentative Communication

Members of the ACAT team gave a presentation on Assistive Technology and Augmentative Communication at the SEAC meeting held on November 27, 2012. Currently, ACPS owns many augmentative communication devices to dramatically increase non-verbal students' ability to communicate, improve behavior, and consequently, leave a student more available to learn. In addition, ACPS owns many assistive technology tools to enhance the education of students of all abilities. However, until now, ACPS has lacked sufficient Assistive Technology specialists to adequately train teachers, students, staff and parents in the appropriate use of the tools. SEAC members are pleased that the Board has allocated the funding necessary to hire the additional staff needed to facilitate the necessary training and make the tools available to students.

Recommendations

1. While acknowledging that progress has been made in each of these areas, SEAC should continue to monitor the focal points of its current scope of work: development and implementation of IEPs, with the goal of achieving full legal compliance on the part of every school within the division; career and post-secondary transition; and plans to improve academic outcomes for students with executive function disorders, as these issues are still on-going.
2. SEAC should continue to foster improved communication with school principals, with the mutual goal of developing collaborative relationships to ultimately better serve all students with disabilities.

3. A collaborative effort should be made among SEAC, the Board, ACPS staff and the City to increase post-secondary job opportunities for students with disabilities.
4. SEAC should regularly continue to monitor progress related to the implementation of the Career and Transition Plan.
5. The School Board should continue to monitor progress related to the implementation of the Autism and Inclusion Plans with regularly scheduled reviews on a quarterly basis.
6. 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 disorders.
7. The successful Parent Engagement Training Series previously presented by the Parent Resource Center should resume.
8. SEAC should provide training on the fundamentals of Special Education to the Board.

Other Items of Discussion

SEAC updated its bylaws from 2004. The revised bylaws were approved by unanimous consent at the June 18 meeting and await final approval from the Board.

For the first time, SEAC hosted a forum for newly elected School Board members to discuss issues specific to Special Education in ACPS.

Also for the first time, SEAC established subcommittees to more efficiently work on areas that are constant to SEAC each year. Subcommittees were established to monitor and review activities relating to the Superintendent's Budget and its effect on Special Education, Disability Awareness, and the Harry Burke Awards.