
Alexandria City Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee

**YEAR 2003 – 2004 ANNUAL REPORT
TO**

**THE SUPERINTENDENT
AND
THE SCHOOL BOARD
OF THE
CITY OF ALEXNADRIA**

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I. Overview

The Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) for the City of Alexandria is established pursuant to regulatory mandate by the Virginia Department of Education to advise the Alexandria School Board about the priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities in the City of Alexandria.

Functions

The committee's functions include the following:

- Provide advice, through the Director of Student Services, to the Superintendent for transmission to the Alexandria City School Board of the school system's unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities;
- Assist ACPS in the formulation and development of long-range plans for improving the performance of children with disabilities;
- Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
- Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the Superintendent for transmission to the School Board;
- Assist ACPS in interpreting to the community plans for meeting the needs of children with disabilities for educational services.
- Review annually the updated annual special education plan and the application for federal funding prior to submission by the Superintendent to the School Board and the Virginia Department of Education.

Membership

For the 2003 – 2004 School Year, there were four appointed members:

Dory Augustine-Bradley, Ronnie Campbell, Michael J. Carrasco, and Tina Games-Evan.

Consultants to the Committee

This year's School Board Liaison was Board Member, Melissa Luby. Our two permanent consultants to SEAC were Ms. Marylou Wall, Director, Student Services and Ms. Anne Lipnick, Parent Resource Center Coordinator.

Membership Requirements

In accordance with the by-laws, all *voting* members' appointments were confirmed by the Alexandria School Board. This year, all members represented Article III, Section C, subsection 2(b) of all categories listed. In accordance with the by-laws, all *voting* members attended at least 75% of the meetings.

Compliance Statement

The Chair and the Vice Chair met on April 2nd, 2004, in accordance with Article VI, Section D, subsection 1(i) and 2(b), of the by-laws, to draft the 2003-2004 Annual Report. A first draft of the Annual Report was presented to SEAC members for review, edits and commentary at the April 20th, 2004 public meeting, held at Minnie Howard School. A final draft was approved at the May 18th, 2004 public meeting, held at Minnie Howard School.

II. Committee Activities for 2003 - 2004

Parents with children in special education programs need the committee as a vital resource for parents and school officials and a valued partner and support system for parents working their way through the special education process maze.

A. Meetings.

In accordance with the by-laws, the Committee met a total of 8 times (dates listed below) during the 2003-2004 School Year, and all meetings were publicly announced in advanced.

Copies of the approved minutes accompany this report.

Meeting dates:

September 9 th , 2003	November 11 th , 2003	January 13 th , 2004
February 24 th , 2004	March 16 th , 2004	April 20 th , 2004
May 18 th , 2004	June 15 th , 2004	

Committee Governance.

SEAC adopted by-laws at the February 24, 2004 public meeting. Signed copies of those by-laws were forwarded to the Clerk of the School Board/Superintendent's Office on February 25th, 2004. Amendments to those bylaws were considered at the April 20th, 2004 public meeting and finalized at the May 18, 2004 public meeting. Those amendments were forwarded to the Clerk of the School Board/Superintendent's Office on May 19th, 2004.

Committee Leadership.

In accordance with Article VII, Section B of the by-laws, at the June 15th, 2004 meeting, SEAC elected the following officers for the upcoming 2004-2005 school year:

Michael J. Carrasco was re-elected Chair of the Committee;

Ronnie Campbell, was re-elected Vice-Chair of the Committee; *and*

Tina Gaines-Evans was elected Secretary of the Committee.

Strategic Goals and Strategies.

In accordance with Article IV, Section C, of the bylaws, SEAC developed a strategic plan and calendar, identifying goals and strategies that SEAC intends to pursue in the upcoming 2004-2005 School Year. A draft of the plan was at the April 20th, 2004 public meeting, was considered and finalized at the May 18th, 2004 public meeting and adopted at the June 15, 2004 public meeting.

A copy of the Strategic Plan and Annual Calendar accompany this report.

B. Outreach

St. Elmo's Coffee Pub.

On March 15, 2004, the Committee partnered with the Parent Resource Center, and invited School Board Chair, Mark Wilkoff, to participate in an informal discussion about concerns parents have about the special education process. All SEAC members were present.

On April 19, 2004, SEAC Chair, Michael J. Carrasco participated in a Parent Resource Center St. Elmo's Group where the speakers were high school students ready to graduate who had received special education services throughout their academic careers.

Meeting with the School Health Advisory Board.

On March 18, 2004, SEAC Chair, Michael J. Carrasco and Parent Resource Center Coordinator, Anne Lipnick, addressed a topical meeting of the School Health Advisory Board regarding an understanding of the special education process and the role of parents and the function of the Committee.

C. Advocacy

Public Comment on the Superintendents' Operating Budget for FY 05.

On February 7, 2004, SEAC Chair, Michael J. Carrasco, addressed the School Board regarding the Superintendent's Operating Budget for FY 05.

Public Hearing on City Council Budget for FY 05.

On April 12, 2004, SEAC Chair, Michael J. Carrasco addressed the Alexandria City Council to support full funding of the Superintendent's Budget for FY 05.

D. Curriculum and Instruction

On-line Individualized Education Plans. Throughout the School Year, SEAC received updates on the IEP on-line training that was started in February 2004. Updates throughout the year have been very positive about the use of this tool. *SEAC believes in finding resourceful uses of technology that lessens the administrative workload of teachers, so they can focus on the educational needs for special education students.*

Special Education Reading Services. At the February 2004 public meeting, SEAC was informed that the majority of children being referred for special education services are being referred for reading services, and therefore, the ACPS was meeting this challenge head on by instituting several reading programs (including Wilson, LindaMood and Start to Finish) with the hopes of decreasing the referrals to special education. *SEAC believes this pro-active initiative by ACPS is excellent and would strongly suggest that the Director of Student Services update SEAC during the upcoming school year (2004-2005) regarding the success or failure regarding these programs.*

After School Program Design. At the February 2004 public meeting, SEAC learned that the City Manager established a task force to design after-school programs within the City of Alexandria, and wanted to consider ideas for children with special needs. SEAC Vice Chair is a member of that task force.

Annual Special Education Plan and Application for Federal Flow-Through Funds. SEAC spent the entire February 24th, 2004 public meeting discussing this plan. SEAC reviewed the plan and asked questions of the Director of Student Services, making comments and few edits.

E. Commendations

The Harry Burke Award.

On May 20, 2004, SEAC hosted the 19th Annual Harry Burke Award, honoring excellence in Special Education. There were 15 nominees. The winner for 2003-2004 was Edward P. Slavinkas recognizing his advocacy, dedication to students, and her overwhelming commitment to special education.

The Committee wishes to extend congratulations to all the nominees:

1. Cynthia Brandenburg
2. Minnie Brawley
3. Katie Dorgan
4. Mary Downs
5. Lorna Eaton
6. Holly Fannon
7. Melva Holloman
8. Meredyth Moustafa-Julock
9. Elizabeth Rankin
10. Stan Reed
11. Rif Riddick
12. Claudette Sims
13. Amy Srsic
14. Christianne Storm (VanLeeuwen)
15. Ann Washington

SEAC Members.

Voluntary participation is the life blood of SEAC. SEAC's best members come from parents who spend what free time they have being involved. So it is always disappointing when a valued member leaves.

Dory Augustine-Bradley

SEAC adopted a resolution expressing its gratitude for her work, not only as a member for 2 years, but also for her work as SEAC's secretary. We wish her much luck in the future.

Melissa Luby

SEAC is grateful for the participation by School Board Member, Melissa Luby. Her insight and advice, and desire to be an open channel between SEAC and the School Board were greatly appreciated.

Mary Lou Wall and Anne Lipnick

None of our efforts are possible *nor* any of our discussions insightful, without the frank counsel of both these individuals.

As Director of Student Services, Marylou Wall skills in walking SEAC Members through the special education process and providing clarification to areas of concern benefit SEAC and are very much appreciated.

The tremendous amount of time and effort by Parent Resource Center Coordinator, Anne Lipnick, to reach out to the special education community and bringing a "*real world perspective*" to SEAC helps bridge the knowledge gap between parents, school officials and other individuals involved in the special education process.

III. SEAC Perspective

At the end of the 2002-2003 School Year, many SEAC members decided to leave for various personal reasons. This year has primarily been on member recruitment and committee development. SEAC has spent many of the meetings clarifying and formulating strategies on how to best fulfill its on-going mission and functions. Listed below, are some highlights regarding that foundation.

Governance

The bylaws require SEAC to adopt a calendar for the upcoming school year, at the last official public meeting. SEAC decided to formulate and adopt a strategic plan to accompany this calendar, in an effort to target outreach efforts and understanding of the various aspects of city-wide special education programs. SEAC believes this exercise of documenting goals and strategies will help with future recommendations to the School Board on up-coming trends and identifying problems in a well thought out manner.

SEAC has taken the step of already identifying specific topics it would like to explore for the 2004-2005 School Year. Prior to four specific meetings, SEAC intends to hold educational “spotlights,” providing background and insight into areas of concern in the special education process in the City of Alexandria.

At the time of the adoption of the Strategic Plan and Annual Calendar, the topics included an overview of ACPS special education services, an understanding of how the budget process works, and a look at nutrition and eating habits in ACPS schools.

SEAC also adopted a policy regarding the participation by the public at SEAC meetings, outlining rules of conduct and decorum for presentations before the SEAC and questioning by members of the public audience to SEAC Members.

SEAC also adopted a member handbook and powerpoint presentation for recruitment purposes.

A copy of the handbook accompanies this report. The powerpoint presentation is located on the ACPS website at <http://www.acps.k12.va.us/prc/index.php>.

Curriculum and Instruction

During the 2002-2003 School Year, SEAC hosted a public meeting as part of routine on-site monitoring by the Virginia Department of Education. In the upcoming 2004-2005 school year, SEAC intends to review that Report, and submit any analysis and recommendations from that Report to the School Board and the Superintendent.

VI. Conclusion

SEAC has spent a good part of the school year, focused on laying down a foundation, defining SEAC in terms of helping parents understand the process, in terms of developing a voice for its constituency, and in terms of educating school leadership about the special education services in the City of Alexandria.

In this technological age, it is our hope to take advantage of any opportunity we have in getting the message of SEAC into the minds of parents with children of special needs. It is our belief that SEAC should continue to examine the issues and topics of how technology impacts learning, and how technology helps parents communicate with their children and how technology can provide curriculum instruction to students with disabilities. If we could make one recommendation right now, it would be if SEAC could post information in the parents resource center section of the ACPS website (<http://www.acps.k12.va.us/prc/index.php>) for the general public, parents and teachers to get information about SEAC or any of materials (such as this Annual Report).

It is our hope to continue to find many more active parents at ACPS. We both strongly encourage you all who know parents of a child with special needs, or if you are at an event and a parent of a child with special needs comes up to talk with you to please take a moment to encourage them to contact SEAC. We continue to add new members to our roster and are strongly encouraging previous members to return. We are made stronger by their participation. We need their input, their advice, and their participation. This is a committee that can do a lot of good.

Finally, as the school year closes, we firmly believe that SEAC now has a renewed focus on its mission and that the strategies developed are always working towards bridging the disconnect between school officials and parents, not just in terms of the special education process, but also in terms of empathy and understanding. We know, first hand, that all parents who become involved in this process -- no matter their intelligence level -- ride the same emotional roller coaster that can trump parental instincts about what is best for their child. It is only after several years of working through the special education process, that parental instincts begin to become more confident. We also know from personal experience, that instruction about the philosophy of inclusiveness benefits more than one person. Embracing children with disabilities reinforces the views that so many civil rights leaders preach: *that understanding our differences helps us become better citizens and better people; that tolerance shapes our knowledge of diversity, which benefits not only our school population but the community at-large.*

On behalf of the Special Education Advisory Committee,

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael J. Carrasco, Chairman
2003-2004 School Year

Ronnie Campbell, Vice Chair
2003-2004 School Year

Enclosures:

2003-2004 Official Public Meeting Minutes
2004-2005 SEAC Strategic Plan and Calendar
SEAC Member Handbook