

Alexandria City Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee
2010-2011 End of Year Report

At its first meeting for the 2010-2011 school year, the Alexandria City Public Schools Special Education Advisory Committee adopted a scope of work that focused on four key areas: Inclusion, Autism, Secondary Transition and Training for staff and parents. Initial meetings for the school year were set aside for presentation of the Autism, Inclusion and Secondary Transition plans to the committee by Student Services staff. The scope of work and agenda were structured in such a way as to devote significant time, during the school year, for review of progress toward the implementation of those plans, to provide feedback and - in conjunction with Student Services - develop a list of action items where concerns or questions existed.

Autism, Inclusion and Secondary Transition

At the meeting held on October 26, 2010, Dr. McLeod presented the division plan for Inclusion to the committee. The following month, on November 23, 2010, Dr. McLeod presented the plan to implement a comprehensive program for students with Autism. It was the unanimous opinion of the committee that the plans presented were woefully inadequate to address the deficiencies existing division wide regarding the implementation of inclusive practices and educating students with Autism. Following the presentation of these plans, the Superintendent initiated two cross-functional working groups tasked with the development of comprehensive plans related to Inclusion and Autism. Working groups consisted of administrators, general education and special education teachers, Student Services staff and parents. Seven SEAC members were participants. The groups worked January through April to develop comprehensive, task-oriented plans that were presented to the School Board on May 4, 2011. The working groups provided an opportunity for collaboration and consensus building by representatives of all stakeholder groups and should be a model for future activities in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Progress monitoring in the implementation of both the Inclusion and Autism plans is critical. The momentum gained in the working groups must continue. In an effort to continue the dialogue and feedback, the working groups will convene on a regular basis to review implementation status. The Autism group will meet monthly and the Inclusion group quarterly.

Transition continues to be of great concern for parents. There was no formal Secondary Transition plan presented; however, relevant Student Services staff participated in a committee meeting devoted to discussion of current activities related to career and transition services. While some steps have been taken to initiate career and transition activities at the high school, there is still no comprehensive Secondary Transition plan. The implementation of two graduation coaches and two transition specialists in the fall of 2009 was a positive step. Parent feedback on the work of the graduation coaches was particularly promising. Of concern is the fact that the

2011-2012 budget eliminated one graduation coach position at a time when that function should have been expanded to include work with 9th through 12th grade students. The integration of students formally segregated from the rest of the TC Williams student community as “life skills” students into the general student population, with access to the general education curriculum - including elective classes, has been very positive. Concerns remain over the high number of students with disabilities that receive modified rather than standard or advanced diplomas, the lack of coordination of services between ACPS and the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) and the limited number of community and business partnerships to provide training and employment opportunities for ACPS students with disabilities.

Recommendations

1. The School Board and Superintendent should continue to monitor progress related to the implementation of both the Inclusion and Autism plans with regularly scheduled program reviews.
2. Following the model of the Autism and Inclusion working groups, ACPS should establish a cross-functional work group to develop a comprehensive, task-oriented Secondary Transition plan.
3. Additional graduation coach positions should be established to support students with disabilities. Particular support should be provided to students in the areas of executive functioning, organizational skills and SOL preparation.
4. Improve communication and cooperation with the Department of Rehabilitative Services and other community organizations.
5. Establish ACPS participation in programs such as Project Search that will provide career and training opportunities for students with disabilities.

Training

Due to changes in SEAC’s agenda related to the Inclusion and Autism plans, the committee was unable to adequately address the issue of training. However, some discussion did occur related to opportunities to expand the role of the Parent Resource Center in providing training and mentoring to parents. During the 2010-11 school year, the Parent Resource Specialists began delivery of a training program for parents that focuses on the special education process within the school system. There would be great benefit to parents if the services provided could be expanded to include greater outreach through implementation of more parent-oriented workshops and support groups, as well as a parent mentoring program.

Recommendations

1. Implement monthly workshops focused on issues of importance to parents such as organizational skills, college, career and transition support and community services.

2. Establish a mentoring program for parents. Expand support group offerings to provide opportunities for exchange of information.

Other Items of Discussion

Of grave concern to the committee is the implementation of ACPS policy that does not allow administrators and special education teachers to specify providers of services in IEPs. The Office of Student Services has required developers of IEPs to use the term *Special Education Staff* rather than allow them to identify specific providers such as special education teacher, general education teacher, etc. This practice enables administrators to replace certified licensed teachers with unlicensed paraprofessionals to deliver instruction. It is the opinion of the SEAC membership that this action greatly diminishes the quality of education provided to students with disabilities in the ACPS. Dr. Holmes and Dr. Quenneville are to provide a response to this issue.

It is with deep appreciation that the committee welcomed Ms. Mimi Carter to SEAC as school board liaison for school year 2010-2011. Ms. Carter's level of participation during the past year has been superb. She has ably taken the concerns of the committee to the board and has served the membership well. Her insights and perspective have been invaluable.

Vickie Cattaneo
Co-chair

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