



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting April 25, 2018

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. PAC Board Chair Amanda Bailey, Past PAC Chair Bill Guthlein, Secretary Melissa Brown, Special Education Director Pam Smith, Standing Committee Chair Blossom Davies, School Committee member Paul Murphy, and five other community members were present.

II. Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes from March 21, 2018, were reviewed. A motion was made and seconded to approve the meeting minutes as written. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Monthly Meeting with Special Education Director

Susan Bohmiller, ABRHS Education Team Leader (ETL), discussed the co-teaching pilot program at the high school. Co-teaching is an inclusion model where a special educator and general education teacher co-lead a class. This model was successfully implemented this year in one section of each of the four core classes for 9th grade students and will be offered within two sections of each core class across all grades next year. Professional development opportunities have been offered to teachers to facilitate on-going success of the co-teaching model, including tours of programs in other districts. The Henderson School in Dorchester is a fully inclusive K-12 school that offers tours to the public as well. The PAC endorses the co-teaching model and hopes to see greater emphasis on inclusion at the lower grade levels as well, including kindergarten. The incoming superintendent, Peter Light, oversaw a full co-teaching model while principal at Franklin High School.

Another point of discussion was access to advanced level courses for students with IEPs. In general, teachers are flexible in accommodating the needs of these students, though in some cases (e.g., AP courses) course content can't be modified. Susan noted that requests for overrides can be an issue, particularly if outside the team's recommendation.

Two additional updates regarding the high school include Larry Dorey's appointment as acting principal for another year as well as the construction of a new Minuteman Tech campus. The district continues to educate students and families about the secondary educational opportunities available at Minuteman Tech.

Staffing changes include the resignation of Merriam/McT/Douglas Educational Team Leader Molly Norton. A search for a permanent ETL will begin this summer.

The Maynard SEPAC is hosting its special education admin in a presentation on the state of special education in their district after her first two years there. The PAC asked if there was interest from the Special Education Director in doing the same here. A presentation date will be forthcoming.

B. PowerSchool Special Education and Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Development—Families' Perspectives, Potential Mini Survey

The switch from E-SPED to PowerSchool has required all IEPs to be entered manually into the new system. Parents have noted some information has subsequently been missing or generalized in IEPs, so it is important to review documents carefully. As with all technology conversions, there has been a learning curve. Student Services is confident that many of these issues will be resolved once all IEPs are in the system. Workshops to facilitate parents accessing and electronically signing the IEPs are pending. The PAC is considering a mini-survey to capture families' experiences with this transition.

C. IEP Progress Reporting

There has been variability in the issuing of IEP progress reports, which IDEA states should be issued concurrently with general education report cards. The PAC is working with Student Services to ensure alignment in reporting, as well as to establish guidelines for those elementary schools which do not issue report cards (Merriam and McCarthy Towne). On-going issues with transparency and access to student assessments was also noted.

Progress reporting for the preschool is also under review and a committee is being formed to discuss the current reporting (a 4-5-page benchmark checklist/report, issued biannually) and compare that with what other preschool programs offer. The PAC notes that the checklist as written obfuscates skill acquisition and that preschool staff have additional non-teaching time to complete paperwork. The Special Education Director noted that the preschool staff frequently pursue professional development opportunities on Fridays.

The PAC reminds families to review Current Performance Levels in IEPs to ensure there is baseline data reported. Baseline data is necessary to track and measure progress over time. Parents have generally reported that OT and PT goals and benchmarks meet SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant/Realistic, and Time-Bound) while goals and benchmarks in other areas are not always measurable. Specific information about goal performance (% success in number of trials, opportunities, etc.) is much more useful than anecdotal information. Some families have reported pushback when asking for more current performance level data or more data-driven goals, with variability across buildings. Ideally, Student Services could support ETLs in aligning districtwide practices, thereby facilitating greater transparency and accountability.

D. District Updating Discipline of Students with Disabilities Policy (File: JKF)

As part of regionalization, the School Committee policy subcommittee has been updating policies and procedures. The PAC has been weighing in as appropriate. The discipline policy for students with disabilities has been revised to include the preschool, such that

the superintendent must be notified if a preschool student is suspended. The PAC notes a parent being asked to pick up a child early due to behavior constitutes a suspension.

E. Discuss Changing AB SpEd PAC Organization Name

The PAC reports that parents have inquired about the possibility of a name change of the organization, as “SpEd” is considered pejorative. As stated in the by-laws, the organization name is “Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council (AB SpEd PAC).” Most districts around the state use SEPAC versus SpEd PAC when abbreviating their organization names. The Executive Director of the Friends of AB SpEd PAC noted concerns with the time and financials necessary to complete a name change with federal and state government agencies given that group’s status as a 501(c)(3). Other issues include web links that will require updating, as well as PAC handouts, pamphlets, and the Parent Handbook. A community member volunteered to help with the process. The Chair noted that language in the organizational by-laws needs updating, so it would be reasonable to make both changes at once. The new organizational name would be “Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council.” A vote is scheduled for next meeting.

F. Community Access and Inclusion Opportunities

Acton Recreation is still seeking commissioners. While some playgrounds meet the legal definition of accessible, they do not have inclusive equipment. Surfaces that are fully accessible for individuals with mobility impairments can cost twice as much as surfaces such as woodchips. The Jones Field Playground renovation project in South Acton is on-going and support is greatly needed on design, outreach, and fundraising.

The Acton Commission on Disabilities (CoD) welcomes new members and has a standing meeting the third Tuesday of every month from 9:30 a.m. -12:30 p.m. at Town Hall.

IV. New Business

A community member asked if the front door of the Admin Building housing the Acton preschool site could be locked during school hours. The Special Education Director noted that the district is aware that this is an issue and is taking steps to remedy it. The PAC Chair noted there is remote capability elsewhere in the district. Community members concurred this needs to be resolved, with many suggesting writing the School Committee.

A community member asked how to ensure students with pull-outs at Douglas have sufficient time and accommodations to complete their project-based exhibition work. The parent expressed frustration that neither general nor special education staff were taking ownership and that the staff were not on the same page. The PAC suggested those being bounced between special education and general education elevate the issues using the district communication map, starting with the principal, then Student Services.

Implementation of the Massachusetts Tiered System of Support (MTSS) is on hold until the district completes the first phase of the equity audit. The equity audit will investigate

outcomes across groups, including gender, elementary school, race/ethnicity, English language proficiency, and students with disabilities.

There is a parent-led movement, the Massachusetts Inclusive Schools Initiative, emphasizing inclusion for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The group intends to advocate for an inclusion endorsement and better practices statewide.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

VI. NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, May 16, 2018, at 7:30 p.m. in the RJ Grey Junior High Library

All AB SpEd PAC meetings are open to the public. We encourage parents of children with special needs and others interested in special education to attend. Please check our website (www.abspedpac.org) for information regarding upcoming events.

Respectfully submitted by Melissa Brown, Secretary