

Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities October 9, 2024

Committee Members in Attendance	Committee Members Absent	Staff and Guests in Attendance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elizabeth Zielinski, <i>Chair</i> ● Holly Stearns, <i>Vice Chair</i> ● Mimi Abdulkadir ● Ally Baldassari ● Jay Berkenbilt ● Ahsen Cakez ● Amanda Campbell ● Brandon Cassady ● Rachel Charlton* ● Anita Chinyavong ● Mary Kay Ciziunas ● Daniel Cronnell ● Susan Edgerton ● Carolyn Haydon ● Harry Henderson ● Colleen Jones ● Hope Luong ● Lauren McCaughey ● Nita Payton ● Brandis Ruise ● Stephanie Smith ● Adriana Van Breda ● Joanne Walton ● Amanda Wittman ● Daniel Yeum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● David Bean ● Delaney Brooks ● Shannon Duncan ● Sonan Sahgal ● Rajiv Satsangi ● Elizabeth Shapiro 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Shannon Anderson <i>Director, Family Resource Center</i> ● Mike Bloom <i>Director, Office of Special Education Instruction</i> ● Terri Edmunds-Heard <i>Assistant Superintendent, Dept. of Special Services</i> ● Kathy Murphy <i>Assistant Ombuds for Special Education</i> ● Dawn Schaefer <i>Director, Office of Special Education Procedural Support</i>

* This committee member participated virtually.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm. A quorum of committee members was present in the room; one member participated virtually.

Minutes

Without objection, the committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting and the agenda.

The chair made brief announcements, including: a reminder to all members to sign the attendance sheet; to use the microphones, speak one at a time, and angle nameplates to be called on to ask a question; and to refrain from interacting with a committee member's guide dog unless getting approval to do so.

Brandon Cassady volunteered to represent the ACSD at the upcoming Dyslexia Open House.

Public Comment

Patty Karchner submitted a statement that the vice chair read into the record. Her statement called on FCPS to provide stronger support to twice exceptional (2E) students.

Michelle Cades also spoke about the need for stronger support for 2E students, citing her child's recent experiences at her high school. She called for a more personalized and supportive approach.

School Board Liaison Report

Rachna Sizemore-Heizer, the School Board's representative to the ACSD, was not in attendance and did not submit a written update.

Family Resource Center (FRC) Updates

Shannon Anderson, the FRC's new director, introduced herself and discussed the center's upcoming programming. She noted that videos on the center's website may be viewed live or on recording, with recordings provided upon request. FRC staff monitor the questions that come in via Padlet, which is available to both teachers and parents, to see if patterns occur, and try to address those issues in future sessions. The FRC provides consultations to parents and has a robust library that is available in person, online, and by request through individual schools. FRC staff members are reviewing library selections to make sure they are up-to-date. They are open to requests for new books.

Ally Baldassari asked what the Family Academy is. Ms. Anderson explained that it is a new online platform (launched on August 1) that includes any information that touches a family (for example, information on a new curriculum would include a video explanation, a list of who to call with questions, and relevant organizations). Mr. Bloom added that DSS is partnering with the Academy to streamline the process to obtain information on special education matters.

Susan Edgerton asked about the focus of this year's annual special education conference, noting that the focus last year was on family and mental health rather than on special education. Mr. Bloom said that this year's event will be a large-scale in-person event that will be called the

Family Summit. It will have sessions dedicated to special education issues (more so than last year's conference). The tentative date is Saturday, March 15, 2025.

Lauren McCaughey expressed her support for the FRC. She noted that she has utilized their resources and encourages others to do the same.

Brandon Cassady expressed concern that the focus of last year's special education conference changed mid-planning, and hopes that will not be the case again this year. He also expressed support for the FRC.

DSS Updates

Mr. Bloom and Ms. Schaefer gave a Powerpoint presentation on implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act (including the new Benchmark Advance basal curriculum and an adapted curriculum), recruitment and retention of special education teachers, the Special Education Enhancement Plan (SEEP), the status of compensatory education, and the use of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). Dawn said she is sending the ACSD two items for review.

Joanne Walton asked if the state of Virginia was going to give all special education teachers membership to the Council for Exceptional Children. As a state issue and not a local one, it was recommended that she contact the Virginia Department of Education with her question.

Stephanie Smith asked how families will be contacted for their reading plan. Mr. Bloom said that plans will be available via ParentVue, and that results of testing will be available at the end of October.

Amanda Campbell asked how mainstreaming in literacy will be affected by the difference between adaptive and general education curricula. Mr. Bloom responded that more information will be provided at the November meeting.

Jay Birkenbilt asked if public day students who would be better served in private placement are being forced to stay in public day settings because of a lack of space in private settings. Ms. Schaefer said that FCPS is trying to find additional providers and has had some success. FCPS will be able to contract with more providers if the School Board approves an update to the policy on restraint and seclusion that would allow placements in schools that allow prone restraints. The School Board should be considering this change this fall.

Lauren McCaughey praised FCPS for hiring an employee who is dedicated to special education hiring. She asked how many special education employees left last year and how many provisional employees and long-term substitutes are being utilized. Mr. Bloom asked her to write down her questions for the record so that he could have time to gather that information. Ms. McCaughey submitted her questions at the end of the meeting and they have been forwarded to Mr. Bloom.

Brandon Cassady asked what efforts FCPS is making to hire candidates who have disabilities. Mr. Bloom answered that the hearing and vision program employs people who have hearing and vision disabilities. He also noted that a person who applies for a position does not have to disclose their disability status, but that anyone who meets the job requirements may be hired. Finally, many special education students are supporting staff and schools as part of their education and training. Ms. Schaefer noted that part of FCPS's transition planning process is to focus on job training. Lauren McCaughey asked if part of the plan is to employ special education graduates; Ms. Schaefer said yes.

New Business

The committee approved Nita Payton as the social media administrator for ACSD accounts.

Ms. Zielinski led a discussion about the way subcommittees will operate this year. They will meet for longer periods of time than in previous years to allow time for speakers and for more work to be done. She encouraged members to refer to already available data before crafting questions; such data sources include state Department of Education data, previous years' ACSD School Board reports, and the FCPS website. Jay Birkenbilt noted the importance of research, data gathering, and effective questions in subcommittee work. He shared his observations from last year, when he was new to the committee and chaired the Family Engagement and Outreach Subcommittee, to support the need to ask clear and specific questions to avoid vague or irrelevant answers. Mr. Bloom offered to provide contact information for DSS staff who are points of contact for each subject. Subcommittees will have an extra month this year to be able to go back to FCPS with follow-up questions once first-round answers have been distributed.

Subcommittees reported who their chairs will be:

1. Strong Start: PreK-12 - Joanne Walton
2. Safe, Supported, Included, and Empowered - Carolyn Haydon
3. Academic Growth and Excellence - Brandon Cassady
4. Equitable Access and Opportunity - TBD
5. Leading for Tomorrow's Innovation - Jay Birkenbilt

Ms. Murphy introduced herself as the Assistant Ombuds and described her role. Mr. Bloom will have a name plate available for her at the next meeting.

Ally Baldassari expressed concern that with the new subcommittee structure, all subcommittees now write their report on the charge. The old subcommittees seem to have been based on our functions per the state mandate (as with the Family Engagement and Community Outreach and Policy and Regulations Subcommittees, which were assigned to "assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community" and "review policies and procedures for the provisions of special education"). With us all working on the charge, we are working on what the School Board has decided should be a priority. However, per the mandate, we are supposed to help them set priorities for special education students, and inform them on needs of which they may not be aware.

Member Time

Stephanie Smith reported that Parents of Autistic Children of Northern Virginia will hold a support group meeting on Saturday, November 2nd at 11:30 am at Oakton Library.

Adriana van Breda encouraged everyone to vote in the upcoming General Election on Tuesday, November 5th.

Daniel Cronnell introduced himself as the representative of the Fairfax/Falls Church Community Services Board, and encouraged anyone who wanted to know how they support students with disabilities to reach out to him.

Brandon Cassady discussed a study regarding concerns with social media use in children, especially with girls. He encouraged members to talk with their children about online activity. The study can be found at this link: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11389274/>

Ally Baldassari reminded committee members that SEPTA's IEP-Palooza will be on November 16 from 9 am to 12:30 p.m., and she encourages committee members to spread the word. She also said that SEPTA's mini-grants of up to \$500 are available to teachers as long as they are SEPTA members.

Amanda Campbell noted the sensory friendly hour during Rolling Valley Elementary's fall festival, which will be from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. on October 26. The school will also have a sensory room for children who need a sensory break. Ms. Campbell also noted that schools in the West Springfield High School pyramid will participate in an annual pyramid challenge. This year's challenge will have a unified run for special education students to participate with general education peers. The event will be on November 16th from 10 am to 12:30 pm at Irvingville School.

Closing Remarks

The Chair noted that this is a time of change for the ACSD under the School Board's new directives, and that her goal is to align the committee's work with their requests to foster a better working relationship and to increase the likelihood that recommendations are digested and implemented. However, Ms. Zielinski welcomes discussion and dissent on all issues.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 pm following a motion of unanimous consent.

Action Items

1. Mr. Bloom will follow up with the School Board liaison about the two policies she mentioned at the September meeting that were to be forwarded to the committee for review
2. The Equitable Access and Opportunity Subcommittee will choose a chair.
3. Ms. Zielinski will send links to VDOE data and past committee reports.