

Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities December 11, 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> • Ally Baldassari • David Bean • Jay Berkenbilt • Amanda Campbell • Rachel Charlton* • Brandon Cassady • Mary Kay Ciziunas • Daniel Cronnell • Shannon Duncan • Susan Edgerton • Carolyn Haydon • Harry Henderson • Lauren McCaughey • Nita Payton • Brandis Ruise • Sonan Sahgal • Rajiv Satsangi • Stephanie Smith • Joanne Walton • Amanda Wittman 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mimi Abdulkadir • Delaney Brooks • Ahsen Cakez • Anita Chinyavong • Colleen Jones • Hope Luong • Adriana Van Breda • Daniel Yeum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mike Bloom <i>Director, Office of Special Education Instruction</i> • Kathy Murphy <i>Assistant Ombuds for Special Education</i>

* Participated virtually.

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:30 pm. A quorum of committee members was present in the room; one member participated virtually.

Minutes

The committee unanimously approved the agenda and the minutes of the previous meeting. The committee also unanimously approved the minutes of the October meeting, which had been delayed in order to make typographical corrections.

Announcements

Ms. Zielinski reminded committee members that all ACSD meetings are recorded, and members should remain aware of this when discussing information of a personal nature.

Public Comment

One public comment was made by Ms. Carolyn Haydon, speaking for herself and not in her role as a member of the committee. She described a recent incident with her son in which the police were called in response to the student's threat of self-harm. The emergency response included seven police and paramedic vehicles and the sixth grade student was placed in handcuffs and prone restraint for 30 minutes. Another incident included Ms. Haydon being threatened by the School Resource Officer with Child Protective Services removing her son from his home. Ms. Haydon has viewed these incidents on video and has extensive experience in the division as a teacher and administrator, and finds the staff response to her child to be exceedingly inappropriate.

Family Resource Center (FRC) Updates

Dr. Shannon Anderson was not able to attend the meeting. In her absence, Mike Bloom shared a report of upcoming events planned for the Family Resource Center.

School Board Liaison Report

Rachna Sizemore-Heizer, the School Board's representative to the ACSD, reported the following:

1. The School Board has voted to approve a more balanced approach to grading related to formative and summative assessments. She noted that while there is a need for consistency in grading policies, there is also a need for some flexibility, in particular with students that have disabilities or learning differences.
2. The next meeting of the School Board on December 19th will include a detailed update on Goal 2 of the Strategic Plan ("Safe, Supported, Included, and Empowered"). This goal includes efforts to increase the rate of inclusivity in general education settings in order to meet state indicators.

3. The School Board has received a report from the outside contractors regarding middle school start times. There are concerns from the ACSD regarding travel time for students with disabilities who attend a school outside their base school boundary.
4. Planning for the next budget is underway, the School Board intends to include more financial support for safety and security matters. It will also be the first year in which collective bargaining agreements will require funding. Currently in discussion is a 7% salary raise.

Amanda Campbell asked about policies regarding communication with parents prior to the close of grading periods when students have incomplete or failing grades. Ms. Sizemore-Heizer responded that there is no system-wide policy regarding specific communication, but there are overlaps with requirements of some jobs to communicate with parents. As an operational issue, it should be discussed with school-based administration.

Lauren McCaughey asked about transition to adult employment for students after they complete their placement at Davis Career Center (for example). Can partnerships be built to facilitate employment opportunities in the community based on the specific training students receive at a career center? Ms. Sizemore-Heizer responded that she is not aware of a specific policy, but she will reach out to learn more.

DSS Updates

Mike Bloom, Director of the Office of Special Education Instruction, reported the following:

1. Special Education Staffing: FCPS has a vacancy rate of 2.8% in special education teacher positions and 2.9% in paraprofessional positions. Provisionally-licensed special education teachers make up 18.6% of staff, teacher trainees make up 4.06%, and long-term special education substitutes are 1.66% of total special education teachers.
2. Staff Recruitment: DSS continues to partner with Human Resources to hold recruitment information sessions by video on the second Thursday of each month. Staff has also been attending job fairs to discuss hiring, pathways to licensure, and answer questions about teaching in FCPS. The FCPS Human Resources Department has also launched Teach Forward in partnership with iTeach. iTeach is an accredited, non-college program focused on offering aspiring teachers accessible and affordable opportunities to earn their teaching certification.
3. Teach Forward: This program has an FCPS cohort of 100 employees who hold bachelors degrees but not teaching licenses. Accepted participants become fully licensed teachers within 12-24 months. In exchange for a commitment to teach for two years in their area of endorsement, candidates can have approximately 90% of the program paid for by FCPS.
4. Family Summit: The 2025 Family Summit (formerly the Special Education Conference) is scheduled for March 15 at South Lakes High School. The ACSD's First Class Awards are presented as part of this event. More information can be found at fcps.edu/family-summit.
5. Extended School Year (ESY): This year's dates for ESY are June 30-July 25th, excluding holidays. Sites and bell schedules TBD, and staff hiring begins in February.

6. COVID-19 Compensatory Education: Past reimbursements are completed up to 98.1%. Future and ongoing reimbursements are complete up to 44.9%. Total service delivery is at 55.7% complete.

Elizabeth Zielinski asked what methods are in place to ensure that long term substitute teachers have access to necessary IEP information? Mr. Bloom responded that it's a school-based procedure, but that substitutes may not serve as case managers.

Lauren McCaughey asked how the teacher vacancy rate compares to previous years. Mr. Bloom responded that the vacancy rate is lower this year than in the past. Ms. McCaughey also asked if year-round contracts (to include ESY) helped fill positions, and Mr. Bloom explained that year-round contracts have not been used, ESY contracts are separate.

Amanda Campbell asked if there was data about where the vacancies are occurring, i.e. types of program (autism, intellectual disability, etc). Mr. Bloom responded that he had not requested that data.

Daniel Cronnell asked for clarification on what constitutes 100% staffing, given that we know some locations have reported needing more staff allocated to them. Mr. Bloom responded that staffing formulas are being considered and addressed by the Special Education Enhancement Planning team.

Susan Edgerton asked if there was a comparison available to teacher vacancy rates in general education. Mr. Bloom didn't have that information at hand and asked that the question be included as a Question for the Record.

Old Business

Subcommittee chairs gave their monthly reports.

1. Strong Start: The group is discussing speaker invitations related to their goal area.
2. Safe, Supported, Included, and Empowered: The group is prioritizing issues of mental health needs and disproportionality in discipline. They will be requesting data on staff members who get hurt on the job.
3. Academic Growth and Excellence: The group discussed synthesizing ideas from previous subcommittee meetings into data requests.
4. Equitable Access and Opportunity: The group reviewed the baseline report for this goal and formulated some questions for staff.
5. Leading for Tomorrow's Innovation: The group hosted three guest speakers, including parents from Davis Center and a transition expert from The Arc of NoVA.

Transition Tool Kit: The ACSD has been asked to review a proposed tool kit for transition, this task has been assigned to the Goal 5 subcommittee.

Family Summit: The chair proposed that Susan Edgerton represent the ACSD on the planning committee for the Family Summit. A motion to approve this proposal was made by Brandon Cassady, it was passed unanimously.

First Class Awards: Joanne Walton has agreed to manage the award nomination process again this year. The Chair proposed adding an award category of “Special Education Team” based on feedback and nominations from the past two years. A motion to approve this proposal was made by Joanne Walton, and it was passed unanimously.

January Meeting: Ms. Zielinski and Ms. Stearns are recommending that the January meeting of the ACSD be used as a “Town Hall” to solicit additional public comment than is usually received. Members were asked to share this information with their representing organizations. Several additional comments and recommendations were made about implementation, those which can’t be incorporated by January will be documented for potential future Town Hall meetings.

New Business

The ACSD has been asked to review FCPS policies 2670 and 2671. Both of these were provided to committee members in advance of this meeting. Neither of these policy updates resulted in substantive changes, redline documents showed additional verbiage but no changes in methodology. Motions were made by Stephanie Smith and Ally Baldassari, respectively, to approve each of these policy revisions. Both motions passed unanimously.

The Chair proposed that Nita Payton be appointed the ACSD representative to the School Boundary Review Committee. A motion to approve this proposal was made by Harry Henderson, and it was passed unanimously.

Member Time

Susan Edgerton asked for people to contact her with suggestions for the Family Summit planning.

Stephanie Smith shared that Parents of Autistic Children of Northern Virginia (POAC-NoVA) is holding their sensory-friendly Santa event on Saturday, December 14. Information is available on the POAC-NoVA website.

Amanda Campbell shared information about the Jingle Jangle Ball, also on Saturday, December 14. Proceeds help with funding the SEPTA mini-grants, information is available on the SEPTA website.

Closing Remarks

The Chair thanked attendees for their participation and wished them an enjoyable winter break. The meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Action Items

1. Subcommittees are asked to get their requests for data needed in their Annual Report section as soon as possible.
2. All ACSD members should inform members of the public about the January Town Hall meeting, and encourage participation in the form of public comment.