

Alexandria City Public Schools
Special Education Advisory Committee Meeting
January 22, 2018
7:00 pm
T.C. Williams
Principal's Conference Room

Draft Meeting Minutes

Call to Order at 7:07 pm

Introductions

In attendance: Janet Eissenstat, Ellen Taverna, Deanne McNulty, Lisa Allison-Lee, Terry Werner, Janet Reese, Margaret Lorber and members of the community

Public Comments

ASA TOPS Winter adaptive program

Carole Beckhorn presented information and answered questions about a winter soccer program she is coordinating in conjunction with the Alexandria Soccer Association. The program will be held on Sundays from 10:30 to 11:30 am at the Bishop Ireton High School Gym. The dates of this pilot program are January 28, February 4, February 25 and March 4. The Parent Resource Center Staff will circulate the flyer to their email list again this week. Dr. Werner will circulate the information flyer to ACPS Specialized Instruction staff. Siblings are welcome to participate in TOP soccer. SEAC members recommended that going forward, ASA should attempt to move the time closer to the time of the regularly scheduled Spring soccer program.

Alexandria Duncan Library Sensory Story Time

Tracy Meserve and Alison McKeever presented information and answered questions about a new program being offered at Duncan Public Library. Sensory story time is designed for children ages 2 to 12 who would benefit from a small group setting for story time. Sensory story time will begin on February 26 and will be held each Monday from 4 – 5 pm. The staff will host an open house on February 12 for potential participants and their families. Siblings are welcome to participate in Sensory Storytime. Janet Reece from the Parent Resource Center staff agreed to circulate flyers for both the open house and the Storytime program.

Main Agenda Topics

Finalize a recommendation to the School Board re the Harry Burke Specialized Instruction awards

Janet Eissenstat led a discussion about the Harry Burke/Anne Lipnick Specialized Instruction Awards. The committee as a whole agreed to the following actions:

1. Dr. Werner agreed to work with the ACPS Information/Technology staff to create a web based nomination form that replicates the one used by the School Board for advisory board committee applications. She will arrange a meeting with the awards committee and the IT staff if needed.
2. The applications will be due in the first two weeks on April. Dr. Werner will set an exact due date based upon the IT staff's timeline for making the nomination form "live."
3. The award ceremony will likely be held on May 24th in conjunction with a school board meeting. Dr. Werner will work with central staff to determine the exact date. Margaret Lorber requested the meeting scheduled for later in the month of May due to her potential absence earlier in the Month.
4. The committee as a whole reaffirmed the agreement to have only three annual awards.
5. The awards are as follows:
 - a. One award for the outstanding K-12 special education teacher or related service provider
 - b. One award for a K-12 general education teacher who demonstrates outstanding inclusionary practices
 - c. One award for the outstanding special education para professional
6. The committee as a whole agreed to rename the awards the "Anne Lipnick Awards for Specialized Instruction."
7. Janet Reese agreed to write a short paragraph explaining who Anne Lipnick was and why the awards are named for her.
8. It was agreed that the Awards Committee should convene in the next two weeks to decide:
 - a. What the awards will physically look like and who will arrange to have them made.
 - b. Who will serve on the selection review committee
 - c. The exact language for the awards criteria

Inclusion Project Grant/Disability Awareness

Ellen Taverna led a discussion and answered questions about a grant opportunity for the Inclusion Project. The Division of Special Education and Student Services of the Virginia Department of Education is offering 6 mini grants (max: \$2,000) to support schools interested in planning an Inclusion Project event to promote disability awareness. (<https://goo.gl/forms/IO5xPT4uWLQeppv1>) The grant application is due Monday, January 29, 2018. Funds cannot be used for food, staff time, or staff travel.

We forwarded the grant information to George Washington Middle School Principal Jesse Mazur last week and expressed SEAC's availability to help write the grant application. GW is in the process of developing the Inclusion Project and forming a Planning Committee this year, so it's an ideal ACPS school to apply. We haven't heard back yet on whether Jesse Mazur would like to apply for the grant. It's been a tough few weeks for GW due to infrastructure/building problems and other pressing issues.

If GW declines, then we will apply for the Inclusion Project grant on behalf of the ACPS Office of Specialized Instruction. We will ask for grant funds to plan a disability awareness event for children at

Del Ray's Art on the Avenue. It would be similar to the 2017 Art on the Avenue event last October and we'll need to recruit more ACPS students to help with the planning and volunteer on the day of the event. This is also a good fit since the discretionary funds for the operating budget for the Office of Specialized Instruction may be less than last year and the Office may not be able to fully fund a 2018 Art on the Avenue event. We're going to explore other local community events that may provide opportunities for additional disability awareness projects this year to use for the grant. Examples listed were through Alexandria Rec Centers, libraries or the West Alexandria Yard Sale – need more information from Margaret Lorber.

ACPS Budget

Deanne McNulty led a discussion and answered questions about the current ACPS Budget. PTAC has contacted Ellen about how SEAC wants to advocate for budget needs to the City Council. It is important that there is an overall push for full funding of the ACPS budget and each individual interest group will do well to contact council members and speak at meetings regarding the ACPS budget needs. A statement from SEAC will be added to the PTAC agenda after the School Board has approved the budget to be sent to the City. It is never too early to talk to your city council members and educate them on the needs of our students and teachers. Plan to bring other parents, family and friends to council meetings to show support of ACPS and request full funding. Dates will be circulated.

SEAC has crafted the following statement to focus the school board on the needs of our students with special needs.

“The ACPS Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) advocates that the ACPS full time equivalent (FTE) positions on the federal IDEA grant be monitored so that, if need be, necessary positions be transferred to the operating budget.

We also advocate that there be set aside \$250,000.00 to be used for implementation and accountability of the 2017-2018 ACPS special education evaluation results.

Finally, we would also like to recommend a review of the ACPS transportation system dedicated to students with disabilities. We believe that there are efficiencies that could be made to cut the expense and allow for increased student interaction and socialization.”

It is recommended that SEAC members meet with all school board members to discuss the specific needs of the Department of Specialized Instruction and request funding to provide service to our population.

Terry Werner will be providing more information for these meetings to help us make the requests more personal and memorable. If you have any examples of transportation challenges that could be beneficial, please contact Deanne to pull together talking points.

A picture is worth 1000 words...a live talk from an interested party is worth more! SEAC members were urged to make a plan to speak at one of the school board meetings to share your reasons why more funding, and at least no further cuts, are necessary for the education of our children.

The school Board Meeting dates: January 22, February 8 and 22, March 8

Report from the Director of Specialized Instruction

Dr. Werner provided additional guidance regarding the budget. She explained that operation budgets are being cut in all departments. She also explained the impact of the IDEA grant and explained how that grant has been used in the past and her concerns for its future use. Committee members expressed their ongoing concern for having the grant money used for employee salary and benefits as the committee views this as unsustainable. There was additional discussion around trying to find private partners to cover the funding gaps for materials.

Dr. Werner also provided a report on the current state of the evaluation. Public Consulting Group is beginning to identify major themes. They will be returning to the school district next month for additional visits. Optimistically, they are hoping to have a report by June 7.

General discussion regarding the visit of new superintendent, Dr. Hutchings, to Alexandria on January 20 followed.

Report from the Parent Resource Center

Janet Reese discussed upcoming events offered by the Parent Resource Center and once again encouraged all SEAC members to participate in at least two educational programs.

Ellen will be working with PRC to plan an ACPS workshop on how to start your own Peer Buddies Program at your elementary school.

Next SEAC Meeting – February 12th

Ellen has organized Fairfax and Arlington SEAC parents to attend our next meeting and discuss their top priorities, pressing issues for their schools, and ways we may be able to collaborate.

We'll need to vote on a new SEAC secretary since both Lisa Remsa and Aaron Cahn are no longer able to attend SEAC meetings.

We'd like to make a new push to recruit Alexandria parents and citizens to become SEAC members.

Adjournment was called for at 9:05 pm