

MEMORANDUM

TO: Arlington School Board

FROM: Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC)

DATE: June 26, 2017

SUBJECT: Annual Year Report 2016-2017

The role of the Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC), as defined by Virginia Department of Education Regulations (8 VAC 20-81 230 D):

1. Advise the local school division of needs in the education of children with disabilities;
2. Participate in the development of priorities and strategies for meeting the identified needs of children with disabilities;
3. Submit periodic reports and recommendations regarding the education of children with disabilities to the division superintendent for transmission to the local school board;
4. Assist the local school division in interpreting plans to the community for meeting the special needs of children with disabilities for educational services;
5. Review the policies and procedures for the provision of special education and related services prior to submission to the local school board; and
6. Participate in the review of the local school division's annual plan.

School Division Commendations: ASEAC would like to thank APS and the School Board for implementing past ASEAC recommendations and for the support they have provided. We would like to acknowledge the Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services, Dr. Brenda Wilks, for her years of dedicated service to students with disabilities. In addition we would like to acknowledge the Office of Special Education (OSE) Director, Paul Jamelske, for his outstanding collaboration and for his hard work on behalf of students with disabilities. It is a pleasure to work with Paul. Finally, we would like to recognize the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Dr. Tara Natrass, for her support and responsiveness in quickly addressing issues that ASEAC members have brought to her attention. We look forward to continuing to work closely with Paul, Tara and other APS staff members as we all work towards the common goal of achieving successful outcomes for students with disabilities (SWD).

ASEAC Priorities and Progress:

At the beginning of this year, ASEAC identified six areas of priority that guided our work this year:

- Priority #1: Committee Organization: grow and diversify membership. Identify, develop and retain future ASEAC leaders;
 - The ASEAC chair attended state level training on special education.

- ASEAC is actively seeking new members, as we have several members rotating off of the committee this year.
- Priority #2: Outreach: Improve virtual participation and accessibility to ASEAC's efforts. Coordinate efforts across ASEAC, SEPTA and APS task forces. Identify if there is a need for additional APS/Parent working groups or task forces;
 - ASEAC rotated meeting locations this year to reach a larger segment of our population.
 - ASEAC sponsored a fall forum for parents on the basics of the APS IEP process.
- Priority #3: Define and Understand the APS SWD Population. Develop a better understanding of our SWD population and its needs;
 - ASEAC continues to work with APS to review existing data on the makeup of our SWD population and unmet needs.
- Priority #4: Family Engagement: Improve SWD parental support, education and engagement;
 - ASEAC encourages APS to provide more accessible information to parents regarding the IEP process and how to find help if a problem arises at the school level. This information should be prominently featured on the OSE web page.
 - ASEAC continued to work with OSE to implement a parent IEP feedback survey (an initiative that began in 2015). OSE asked schools to distribute surveys to parents at IEP meetings. However, it is not clear that all parents are informed of the survey by their school. ASEAC believes changes to the distribution/collection process of the survey are necessary to ensure that all families are made aware of the survey and its intended purpose to help guide improvements in meeting our students' needs.
- Priority #5: Student Achievement and Success: Understand math and reading performance across disabilities. Identify areas that need focus, attention and action;
 - ASEAC held a meeting focused on the review of existing reading data and assessments currently being used.
- Priority #6: Compliance: Recommend ways for APS to improve how it meets its obligations to SWD;
 - ASEAC has identified institutional barriers that have the potential to cause problems with compliance and accountability. ASEAC's recommendation below addresses this issue.

ASEAC Recommendation:

ASEAC has received reports of school-based decisions and actions that indicate a disconnect between guidance issued by the Central Office and the actual experiences of families and students with disabilities in the schools. Individual ASEAC members have also received reports or experienced school-based decisions and actions that are inconsistent with APS special education directives, best practices, and in some cases, with applicable laws. We believe that this problem of accountability stems, at least in part, from the current organizational structure of APS, in which responsibility for students with disabilities is split between three separate departments. **We encourage APS to re-examine its organizational structure to determine if an organizational realignment could improve accountability and eliminate confusion.** This is a complex issue that warrants further review so we are not recommending one specific solution at this time. Rather, we are raising the topic for consideration with the hope that a solution can be developed that better meets the needs of students with disabilities. For more information, please see Appendix 1.

Subcommittee Reports: ASEAC has several active and hard-working subcommittees and we would like the School Board to see the important work that these subcommittees have done this year. Please see Appendix 2 – Subcommittee Reports for reports from three of these subcommittees. These subcommittee reports contain recommendations from each subcommittee that reflect the opinions of those subcommittees based on needs they have identified. ASEAC has not yet considered these subcommittee recommendations.

Other ASEAC Accomplishments:

- Under the leadership of ASEAC Policy Subcommittee Chair Nick Walkosak, ASEAC actively participated in, and provided input to, six School Board policy revisions and their respective policy implementation procedures (PIPs) to include 25, 25-1.2, 25-1.15, 25-2.1, 25-3.5, 25-4.1, 25-4.3, 25-4.4 and 25-5.
- ASEAC met 10 times this year. Meeting topics were as follows:
 - September 2016 – Special Education Evaluation Progress Update
 - October 2016 – The IEP process
 - November 2016 – Policy reviews and establishment of policy review subcommittee, diploma options
 - December 2016 – Reading focus (PALS and RI data)
 - January 2017 – Every Student Succeeds Act discussion
 - February 2017 – Policy updates, IEP surveys, Year end report
 - March 2017 – Special education annual application draft discussion
 - April 2017 – Inclusion/ATSS discussion, approval of annual plan
 - May 2017 – VDOE dispute resolution
 - June 2017 – End of year meeting, new leadership, approval of annual report to the SB

Committee Members:

Heather Alderman, Adriana Asef-Sargent, Nadine Asef-Sargent, Michelle Best, Cloe Chin (secretary), Margaret Dunn, Nadia Facey (incoming secretary), Genevieve Heighberger, Jennifer Johnson, Kay Luzius, Margaret McGilvary, Donna Owens (vice

chair), Sara Jane Owens, Rebecca Patterson, Paul Patterson (chair), Wendy Pizer (incoming vice chair), Gary Steele, Tauna Szymanski, Nicholas Walkosak,

STAFF LIAISON: Paul Jamelske

Appendix 1: ASEAC Accountability Recommendation

The Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC) has concerns regarding accountability with respect to special education within Arlington Public Schools. We are especially concerned by the stark disconnect between guidance issued by the Central Office and the actual experiences of families and students in their schools. Special education practices are inconsistent across APS schools. We believe that this problem of accountability stems, at least in part, from the current organizational structure of APS. The Director of Special Education has no authority over school administrators. The Office of Special Education falls within the Department of Student Services, but the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services has no authority over school administrators, either. A second department, the Department of Instruction, supervises general education, but not special education or school administration. Instead, the Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services has supervisory authority over school administrators, but not special education or instruction.¹

Special education frequently falls between the cracks of the current organizational structure. Students who receive special education services have their general education supervised by the Department of Instruction, their special education services supervised by the Department of Student Services, and their school administrators supervised by the Department of Administrative Services. With three different departments responsible for supervising different aspects of these students' education, it is very difficult to get special education concerns effectively addressed.

There have been instants in which the only way for a concern to be addressed is for three separate department heads – Administrative Services, Student Services, and Instruction, to approach a principal together to handle a problem at the school level. While this inter-department cooperation is commendable, it is not an efficient way to solve problems. The average parent would never know to approach three separate departments to have a problem solved, let alone be able to leverage support simultaneously from each department. ASEAC has continually raised items with the Office of Special Education, which the Office has tried to address, but with varying degrees of success at the individual school level.

At the same time, we also see a disconnect between special education and general education. While there are pockets of excellent collaboration, including highly effective co-teaching arrangements, in places throughout our system, this is not the norm in all of our schools. Too many general education teachers lack the training they need to effectively teach students with special needs in their classrooms. This lack of consistency again ties back to problems with accountability at the school level.

APS's accountability problem was also flagged years ago by the Public Consulting Group in its 2013 report, "Final Report: Evaluation of APS Services for Students with

¹ See APS Organizational Chart, <https://www.apsva.us/superintendents-office/executive-leadership-team/organizational-chart/>

Special Needs.” In that report, accountability was one of six core areas recommended for improvement.

For these reasons, we encourage APS to re-examine its organizational structure to determine if an organizational realignment could improve the accountability problems at the school level. This is a complex issue and we are not recommending one specific solution at this time. Rather, we are raising the topic for consideration with the hope that a solution can be developed. We believe that now is the right time to consider an organizational realignment. APS has experienced extraordinary growth in recent years, a trend that is projected to continue. A structure that was put in place to handle a smaller student population may no longer work with our much larger student population. Moreover, the impending retirement of our Assistant Superintendent for Student Services brings an opportunity to consider changes to the requirements for that job position.

Thank you for consideration of this important topic. ASEAC looks forward to engaging in productive conversations with School Board members and APS staff as we all work towards the common goal of achieving successful outcomes for all types of learners within APS.

Appendix 2: Subcommittee Reports

ASEAC Dyslexia Subcommittee Annual Report 2016-2017

Key activities and major accomplishments:

- 2 ArlingtonReading Yahoo Group/Decoding Dyslexia VA Parent Support Group Meetings (Fall 2016 and Spring 2017)
- October 2016 PRC Dyslexia Movie Screening (2nd Annual - over 100 attendees)
- March 2017 PRC/SpEd Dyslexia Awareness Work Shop (5th Annual Training -75 rsvp's)
- March 2017 Dyslexia Consultant (Dr. Sandman-Hurley) Training for special education teachers (Dyslexia Goal Writing for IEPs)
- May 2017 Dyslexia Consultant (Dr. Sandman-Hurley) Training for Principals, Assistant Principals, School Psychologists - Dyslexia Awareness and Special Education Eligibility Testing
- May 2017 (upcoming) Dyslexia Consultant (Dr. Sandman-Hurley) Training for Parents and APS Staff (Dyslexia Awareness)
- APS Dyslexia Task Force Meetings July 2016, January and March 2017
- ASEAC Participation in the ongoing ELA Resource Adoption Process

Prioritized needs and recommendations:

- **Continued APS Staff and Parent Awareness:** Design and execute a 1/2 day Dyslexia Symposium for parents, students, and staff with dyslexia experts, APS staff, parents, and students leading various presentations and discussion groups to learn about many topics affecting dyslexia such as identification, testing interpretations, evidenced-based instruction, accommodations, assistive technology, family support, etc.
- **Identification:** Implement the APS Dyslexia Consultant's (Dr. Sandman-Hurley) recommendation to supplement APS's dyslexia screening process so that APS can improve its effectiveness in identifying dyslexic students before they fail (see pages 15-17 of Dr. Sandman-Hurley's report).
- **Instruction:** Continue to forecast/predict APS staff training needs in dyslexia specific reading, spelling and writing instruction and ensure student needs are matched to trained teachers to the greatest extent possible in the least restrictive environment.
- **In-House/APS Dyslexia Expert/Advisor:** Implement the APS Dyslexia Consultant's (Dr. Sandman-Hurley) June 2016 recommendation and the Virginia 2017 legislation for APS to have a dyslexia specialist/advisor.

Supporting data:

Dr. Sandman Hurley's report:

"Focus group participants expressed that they needed support from a very knowledgeable person about dyslexia in several areas. This could be accomplished with district level Dyslexia Specialists. APS should consider creating positions for district Dyslexia Specialists/Coaches who will provide support to teachers who are working with students with dyslexia and suspected

dyslexia. The Dyslexia Specialists will assist teachers with progress monitoring, assure the fidelity of the intervention, provide feedback about teaching techniques, aid in goal writing for IEPs, attend IEP meetings, host ongoing professional development in the area of intervention, progress monitoring and accommodations for students with dyslexia.” (p. 30)

List of subcommittee members:

Cloe Chin, Chair, Donna Owens, Kate Sheehey, Deb Brennan, Stephanie Alisuag-Schreiber, Sandy Minners

ASEAC Inclusion Subcommittee Annual Report 2016-2017

The Inclusion Subcommittee was formed to encourage APS to reduce the extensive, ineffective, and non-evidence-based segregation of students with disabilities (SWD) in APS.

Key activities and major accomplishments:

- Members of the Subcommittee worked with the Special Education Parent-Teacher Association (SEPTA) to organize a second annual professional development opportunity for APS teachers and staff. On March 18, 2017, preeminent inclusive education expert Dr. Cheryl Jorgensen gave a full-day, very well-received workshop to APS teachers and staff. (The first workshop was provided by the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education on November 14, 2015.)
- Our ongoing work includes educating the community on the research on inclusive education; sharing webinar and conference opportunities with APS staff and parents; encouraging APS to reduce its segregation problem; trying to obtain data from APS on baseline inclusion-related indicators; and working with the Virginia inclusion task force on complementary efforts.

Prioritized needs and recommendations:

- ASEAC's annual recommendation last year included several ideas surrounding inclusion and the School Board set aside \$140,000 for an inclusion consultant on this basis. The Subcommittee continues to stress the importance of APS engaging one of the dozen or so experts who assist school districts to systemically reform instructional delivery to students with disabilities.
- In the meantime, it is important for APS to collect key baseline data so that progress can be measured.
- Merging the Department of Instruction with the Department of Special Education would reduce silos -- a known barrier to progress.

Supporting data:

The Inclusion Subcommittee has had a difficult time obtaining data from APS on the numbers of SWD who are placed in segregated settings (including private placements) for most of the school day, but based on data on the APS and VDOE websites, estimates that over 500 SWD spend the majority of the school day segregated from non-disabled peers.

Subcommittee members:

Tauna Szymanski, Genevieve Heighberger, Nick Walkosak, Kay Luzius, Gary Steele, Heather Alderman.

ASEAC Down Syndrome Subcommittee Annual Report 2016-2017

Key activities and major accomplishments:

- Members of the subcommittee worked to identify common issues among parents of children with DS.
- The subcommittee has met numerous times and developed several recommendations.

Prioritized needs and recommendations:

- APS needs at least one special education coordinator trained in Down syndrome (DS) education and current research to support/educate IEP teams and ensure DS-appropriate teaching strategies, curriculum materials and assistive technology are available and shared. IDEA requires that each IEP describe the “supplementary aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable, to be provided to the child.” To meet this requirement, APS needs at least some of the personnel teaching students with Down syndrome and others with similar learning styles to get training and be familiar with the research based best practices.
- APS needs to modify math and science curriculum for certain students with disabilities. Some students with working memory deficits require scaffolding and simplification strategies for effective learning, such as rote, practical strategies for math rather than teaching multiple conceptual strategies for the same task before reaching mastery of one strategy.

Supporting data:

- <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2013/03/18-eighth-grade-math-loveless>
- <http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/down/conditioninfo/Pages/default.aspx>
- <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25148055>

Subcommittee members:

Margy Dunn, Gary Steel, Kay Luzius