

**Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee
Minutes
September 25, 2018**

Members Present:

Wendy Pizer (Chair), Nadia Facey (Vice-Chair), Nick Walkosak (Co-Secretary), Margy Dunn (Co-Secretary), Amber Baum, John Best, Michelle Best, Keith Channon, Alison Dough, Kristin Gillig, Jay Hamon, Jennifer Johnson, Kay Luzius, Kurt Schuler, Tauna Szymanski, Minerva Trudo, and Cristina Yacobucci

Members Absent:

Alison Acker, Leila Carney, Caitlin Davies, Sarah Jane Owens, and David Rosenblatt

Staff:

Paul Jamelske (Director of Special Education),
Kathleen Donovan (Parent Resource Center)
Kelly Mountain (Parent Resource Center)
Monique O'Grady (School Board)

Guests:

Lara Abercrombie, Jessica Frank, Janet Pence, Nicole Davidson, Jen Myers, Michael Trudo, Stephanie Alisuag-Schreiber, Anna LaVardera

AGENDA:

Agenda Items	Discussion/Decisions	What to do/who/when
Welcome		
Wendy Pizer	Welcome and introductions	
Public Comments		
Cara Abercrombie	<p>My comment has to do with the IEP meetings for transitions between elementary/middle and middle/ high schools.</p> <p>I would like to recommend that, as a matter of policy, in years when students are transitioning from elementary to middle or middle to high school, IEP meetings be convened by the new, receiving school.</p> <p>My daughter transitioned to Kenmore middle school this month. Last spring, as we prepared to convene my daughter's annual IEP meeting, my husband and I made numerous requests to hold the IEP meeting at Kenmore, to reflect the pending school transition. Her elementary school refused on the grounds that, if it was responsible for implementing the IEP for any period of time, no matter how short, it should have the lead. Two weeks in to middle school, it was abundantly clear to my daughter's Kenmore team that her IEP is not appropriate for her</p>	

	<p>courseload or placement. As a result, we convened another IEP meeting in the third week of this school year to correct the inadequacies. This could have been avoided, and time saved, had we been permitted to have the IEP meeting at Kenmore from the get go.</p> <p>Sensible IEP teams should be able to write an IEP for the new middle school environment than can be supported by the elementary school for a few weeks.</p>	
<p>Kay Luzius</p>	<p>There is no option for extended day at Yorktown High School. This option exists at Stratford, but not Yorktown, so students who have switched from Stratford to Yorktown that relied on extended day now do not have this available. If APS wants to move to more inclusive options for students, this is something that needs to be addressed.</p>	
<p>Keith Chanon</p>	<p>I am here to comment on my concerns about the quality of special education at Discovery Elementary.</p> <p>At first, my family was thrilled to be at Discovery for its well-known academic reputation and state of the art facility. However, we soon learned that there is minimal flexibility and a shortfall of services for students with disabilities. School leadership does not employ the multitude of expertise and services available from APS to ensure that all student needs are being met effectively. It is clear that the school relies on the existence of its county-wide Functional Life Skills classroom (the most restrictive environment), to accommodate students with complex needs. There is little investment or support for “inclusive” best practices in the K-5th grades.</p> <p>There are also shortfalls in the implementation of: 1. A “total communications approach” 2. The sustained use of assistive technology, and 3. Effective behavioral interventions.</p> <p>These are significant areas of need for students, and in all cases, APS can provide additional support. However, Discovery failed to address these areas of significant need.</p> <p>It is unfortunate that many families with children with disabilities have opted to enroll their children in private schools because of the systemic problems at Discovery. I urge you to review the school’s practices and to talk to the many parents who have struggled to access needed services for their children.</p>	
<p>April Maddox</p>	<p>My son, Ben, is 10 year old boy who loves playing soccer, being a Cub Scout, and playing video games with his friends. At first glance, Ben can seem like a pretty typical kid but Ben is not your typical APS student. Ben has been diagnosed with high-functioning Autism as well as ADHD and struggles academically. Ben was first placed in special education through APS at the age of 3 and, at that time, we felt incredibly lucky to live in Arlington where special education services seemed to be plentiful.</p> <p>Initially, Ben had serious behavioral problems but was meeting</p>	

	<p>all academic milestones. As his behavior improved, his special education hours were decreased from a high of 25 hours per week to just 6 hours per week. While the gradual decline in support hours concerned me, I was assured that he was on grade level and meeting all expectations. When I discovered that Ben had failed his 3rd grade SOLs, I felt blindsided and immediately sought more services for Ben. After many meetings and much heated discussion about Ben's need for small group instruction, APS only agreed to give Ben one more hour of special education each week... just 7 hours per week and a little over one hour per day. Soon thereafter, I gave up on APS and sought private school placement. Ben started 5th grade at The Newton School, a private special education school in Sterling, VA with a student/teacher ratio of 5:1, this past month and, while the school year has just begun, I am confident that the smaller class sizes will be incredibly beneficial to Ben.</p> <p>In researching private special education schools in the area, I was surprised to learn that the typical student/teacher ratio in special education is 5:1. This is in stark contrast to the 25:1 ratio in many of APS's elementary schools, where many of APS's special education kids spend the majority of their day. During his last year at APS, Ben stated repeatedly that he could not learn in a classroom with so many kids and distractions. I was also surprised to learn that private schools can deliver this smaller student/teacher ratio as they have significantly fewer administrators and more teachers.</p> <p>When I learned this summer that APS was cutting its special education budget and that Discovery was losing a special education teacher, I was very sad. Not for Ben as he is no longer being educated at APS, but for all the other students who, like Ben, can't learn in a classroom with such a large student/teacher ratio but have parents that cannot afford to spend \$30,000 to \$50,000 per year on private school tuition. I urge APS to think long and hard about what is most important for their students, especially students like Ben. Is it a flashy new building and I-Pads for every student or is it having enough teachers to meet the needs of the students?</p>	
<p>Shana Harbour</p>	<p>I was so disappointed in Reading Camp. I spent a lot of time last spring asking questions and doing my due diligence on what to expect for reading camp. I heard a great albeit ambitious plan stating:</p> <p>"Students' schedules for summer reading camp will be built based on student needs. Some students may receive specific reading instruction (OG, LLI, etc.) in a small group for the full day. Some students may receive specific reading instruction in a small group for half the day and then engage in science inquiry (with a literacy focus) for the other half. The model for summer school is a rotation model with flexible schedules for students depending on their specific needs".</p> <p>Our experience was far from the vision laid out last spring. The first week his regular teacher was absent 3 of the 5 days. She has no training in OG, LLI, etc., NONE. He was pulled out for two 30-minute sessions by a specialist who was qualified,</p>	

however the first week he missed his pull out, because they were going to the library. Out of the first 20 hours of summer school he had one hour of instruction. I talked to the Principal who said that the reading camp is separate did not interact with the strengthening program—which was the primary reason it was decentralized in the first place.

Other than the 30 minutes of instruction in OG or Phono-graphix the rest of the day was wasted. The classroom schedule:

- Morning greetings and welcome activity:
- Writing in a journal and reading what you wrote out loud. My son has told me the teacher never checked his journal for spelling—never even looked at it. This is what my son's journal looks like. "Ysday I mode the lon i hat sumr scool."
- Reading silently to yourself.
- Pull out for 30 minutes
- Closing activity

For every 3 hours my son was at summer school he gets 30 minutes of instruction—2.5 hours a week if everything went as planned—10 hours out of 80 total. Most of the time is spent with a teacher who did not have the training to address my son's decoding and spelling needs.

I was still very upset that most of the time spent in class in no way addressed any of his issues. I wrote to Dr. Natrass and others regarding the expectations versus the reality of reading camp. The remedy was to move my son to another classroom. The main criteria for grouping kids was not similar reading skills or IEPs as I was told, but what grade they were in.

My son was apprehensive about switching classrooms so I took him to school the next morning to meet the teacher and ensure a smooth transition. I'm so glad that I did that as the old classroom and new classroom were night and day. His new classroom was awesome—exactly what you would expect for reading camp. The teacher had posters on the walls of vowel pairs, affixes and suffixes etc.... Classroom time was very structured with different writing assignments, reading and decoding, small group work etc.. Compared to the other classroom where the teacher never looked at their journals, they read to themselves silently and played MadLibs and hangman. We went back to collect his belongings from the other class and his teacher had nothing on the walls, had her headphones on and looking at her phone. She barely acknowledged us. In his new classroom my son made a lot of progress and got the instruction he needed. But what about the other 7 children remaining in that classroom with a sub-par

teacher? How does playing MadLibs and reading to yourself help with decoding and spelling?

I believe there were a few factors that contributed to my experience with reading camp this year. APS said it was going to be customized to every child's needs based on their IEP and other data. The reality, at least in my situation, was that the kids were grouped by grade. No one has looked at any data to customize his placement. All of the 4th graders were placed in one classroom. Not only was the teacher not qualified to teach kids with dyslexia, she was below average in every way—including not showing up for work.

I think it is good to have ambitious goals and the plans for summer school in general are laudable. I commend APS staff and leaders as everyone at APS tried to help. No one shied away from the problem—everyone listened and did what they could and I'm grateful for that.

The following are recommendations for reading camp:

Easy to Implement:

- Early communication to parents—all summer school teachers must send an introductory letter home on the first day with class room schedule, structure and what they plan to cover and contact information.
- Communicate with teachers about summer school. I knew more than the teachers did from attending the ELAAC. How can teachers give information for placement if they don't know anything about summer school?
- Be honest on what APS can realistically offer then parents can make an informed choice about whether or not APS's reading camp is right for their child. If all that can realistically be guaranteed is 30 minutes of instruction per day then message that versus promising a tailored program that for each child that cannot be delivered.

Medium Difficulty:

- Go back to the centralized model (I know that there are tradeoffs with transportation and logistics). The pros are there is a larger pool of students from which to form groups based on similar needs, teachers can support each other, and the principal will be actively involved in the program.
- Transparency into how the children are grouped. What data are used to group students? Where does it come from and who is doing the grouping? This needs to be understood and transparent.
- Consider having the SPED teachers help with grouping classrooms for reading camp.

	<p>Difficult: Hire only qualified teachers with OG or other multi-sensory qualifications. Offer real incentives for teachers who are qualified to teach, such as extra credit towards retirement, more professional development opportunities, etc...</p>	
Monique O’Grady (School Board Liaison) – Welcome and Remarks		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. O’Grady introduced herself – she is a member of the School Board and is the ASEAC Liaison. She has a 9th grader at Wakefield, and two older graduates of APS in their 20s. • She spoke about what to expect the SB to address this year: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Setting priorities, including working on an inclusion policy. There’s no one solution for special ed. Differentiation is very important. Spoke to a lot of parents regarding the move of the Stratford Program. * Strategic Plan – they have adopted goals and are working on objectives, including 80% of SWD included at least 80% of the time. * SB is having a Work Session on special education in January 2019, they are willing to take suggestions and will probably work from ASEAC’s last recommendations from last year. * Spoke about the special education program evaluation process this fall. <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Nick Walkosak: Where are we currently? ○ Tauna Szymanski: Current number is 63.28% (2016-2017), with state target being 69% 	
Paul Jamelske - Office of Special Education (OSE) Update		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>OSE Response to September Meeting Public Comments</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Regarding the issue involving transitions from elementary to middle and high school – there were several meetings at the elementary school, as well as the middle school. Depending on the complexity of student needs, more attention and active participation may be needed between the sending and the receiving school. At least one meeting at the new school site may improve the readiness if the receiving school and staff could meet ahead of time. It is a busy time in the spring, and elementary, middle, and high schools put forth 	

	<p>communication and effort in working with families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Former and Current Stratford Program Students at Yorktown – regarding the unavailability of accessing extended day from Yorktown, high schools do not have extended day, which is why it hasn't been available at Yorktown. Parent, Kay Luzius clarified her public comment for Paul considering former Stratford students that went from Williamsburg and moved on to Yorktown. Her question was about options for students who have needs and working parents that need to access extended day – how can the inclusion model work for kids to be back in their neighborhood schools and address this need. Paul will reconsider and look into this. ○ There was a concern about Discovery and the lack of continuum of services between life skills and full inclusion. APS is looking at several schools where there are greater levels of inclusion, and consideration of options for small groups and a broader continuum. We need to be flexible to meet the needs of children as they may evolve over time. There is no one-size-fits-all model. ○ Regarding the length of time to receive services (i.e., Discovery, Nottingham) – Paul referred to the ATSS process and that interventions can be started, and a child may be in the evaluation process at the same time. Services do not have to be delayed for 6 or more weeks until after the evaluation is over. <p>Reading camp – there were modifications this past summer to reading camp. The camp was decentralized so there was more availability than in previous years. Delivery of services (LLI, OG, Phono-graphix) was adjusted. Some teachers were added, as camp was held at all 8 elementary schools. The Office of Special Education is working with Dr. Kelly Krug, Dr Natrass, Meg Davis, and others for a debrief next week about summer school and reading camp to consider what went well and what may need to be modified to continue to improve. Nadia Facey requested that Paul follow up with us on this.</p> <p>○</p>	
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Wendy Pizer (ASEAC Chair) – ASEAC Overview

	<p>Wendy presented slides about ASEAC's role, interplay with ACI, and where we get data. The brief overview is based on the VDOE presentation last year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · ASEAC is a state mandated advisory committee, and also a public entity so FOIA applies. · ASEAC is currently full with 22 members (19 community members, 1 teacher, 1 student) and APS staff. 	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Members can serve a maximum of 6 years, are approved by the School Board, and required to attend meetings. If 3 or more meetings are missed, a member may be asked to leave. · Regarding ASEACs role in APS, we are part of ACI and provide recommendation reports every other year, and updates every year. <p>Unique functions of ASEAC: it exists per state regulations, members are appointed by the School Board, submits reports to the School Board, reviews policies/procedures, and reviews the annual plan.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · How does ASEAC learn of the unmet needs of special education students? Through public comments (patterns/trends), review of past reports, review of policy and procedure, communication with staff, APS program evaluations, special education and 504 surveys, and reviewing data. · Relevant initiatives this year in APS: School Board Work Session on Special Education (1/16/2019), Special Education Program Evaluation, Inclusion, Budget, and Transportation Route Planning. 	
<p>Nadia Facey – Special Education Program Evaluation</p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCG is having a kickoff meeting with a variety of stakeholders on October 4, 2018. • PCG will come to our November meeting. • Surveys will be administered in late Nov and early Dec to a variety of APS stakeholders. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trying to get a group together to review the surveys in advance. • Regina Van Horn is the APS liaison; Wendy and Nadia are meeting with the two main parent representatives who led the PCG evaluation effort in 2012. • ASEAC needs to decide how we want our meeting with PCG to go – please give Nadia feedback. • Let Nadia know if you want to be part of the test-drive and focus groups - people who are knowledgeable about the issues, it is not a huge time commitment. 	
<p>Open Discussion Period and Working Groups</p>		

	<p><u>Other ASEAC Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student transportation improvement effort • Five ASEAC subcommittees/working group proposed this year: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy Review Working Group (Walkosak) ○ Accountability/Consistency (Luzius/Johnson) ○ Mental Health (Best) ○ Outreach (Yacobucci) ○ Professional Development (Chanon) • ASEAC voted on the proposed group: Nadia Facey made the motion to establish them, and Tauna Szymanski seconded it. Seventeen voted yes, zero voted no, and zero abstained. • To address FOIA notice issues, Wendy is encouraging subcommittees to meet immediately after the end of the monthly ASEAC meetings. 	
Meeting Adjourned	Meeting Adjourned at 9, working groups continued to meet after adjournment	

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, October 23rd 2018 from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Syphax Education Center, 2110 Washington Blvd, Room 456, Arlington, VA 22204