

**Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee  
Minutes  
November 27, 2018**

Members Present:

Wendy Pizer (Chair), Nadia Facey (Vice-Chair), Nick Walkosak (Co-Secretary), Margy Dunn (Co-Secretary), Amber Baum, John Best, Michelle Best, Leila Carney, Keith Channon, Caitlin Davies, Jennifer Johnson, Kay Luzius, David Rosenblatt, Kurt Schuler, Tauna Szymanski, Minerva Trudo, and Cristina Yacobucci

Members Absent:

Alison Acker, Alison Dough, Sarah Jane Owens, Kristin Gillig

Staff:

Paul Jamelske (Director of Special Education),  
Kathleen Donovan (Parent Resource Center)  
Kelly Mountain (Parent Resource Center)  
Regina Van Horne (Assistant Director for Program Evaluation)

Guests:

Nicole Davidson, Jana Dressel, Will Gordillo, Laura Simpson, Tina Chiappetta, Courtney Fox, Clara Shriner, Heather Wishart-Smith

**AGENDA:**

<b>Agenda Items</b>	<b>Discussion/Decisions</b>	<b>What to do/who/when</b>
Welcome		
Wendy Pizer	Welcome and introductions	
Public Comments		
Courtney Fox	<p>My name is Courtney Fox, and I am the parent of an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at Jefferson Middle School and a former Nottingham student; my younger daughter, who is now in 5<sup>th</sup> grade at the McLean School in Maryland, was enrolled at Nottingham until January 1 of this year.</p> <p>Between our two daughters, my husband and I know what it's like to have a child who is identified gifted and also has a 504 enrolled in a school that supports her emotionally while challenging her intellectually. We know what it's like to be part of a 504 team that's truly a team. We know what the outcome can be when your child gets the support she needs.</p> <p>We also know what it's like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to navigate Response to Intervention (Rtl) for two years in spite of the fact that it's intended to be short-term and</li> </ul>	

should not be used to delay identification of suspected disabilities;

- to see your child's confidence disappear and see her withdraw socially;
- to communicate frequently with the school for years, asking for help only to be told "trust us" but never referred for an IAT or student study;
- to deal with horrific and frequent school refusal incidents;
- to be gaslighted by a school and told that problems at home, no matter the cause, are "home problems" and not their problem.

We know what it's like:

- to pursue private testing in the spring of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade because we didn't know the magic "student study" words;
- to get a diagnosis of dyslexia, ADHD and anxiety, along with a profoundly gifted IQ, and hope that NOW, working *with* the school, you can finally get your child the help she's needed for years;
- to then have to fight daily to get the IEP actually implemented and amass proof of significant violations;
- to see a once joyful, silly, and creative child become so broken by school that, at age 9, she tells you that she wants to die.

Unfortunately, we also know what it's like:

- to have to hire an advocate and, eventually, an attorney to fight for your child's right to access her education when your concerns are dismissed;
- to listen to other parents fight similar fights;
- to worry about the children whose parents aren't empowered – financially, through language barriers or otherwise – to advocate for them.

And I'm sorry to say that we know what it's like:

- to cry with and for your child, promising her that things will get better and begging her to trust you even though you make her go every day to a place she calls the "death trap;"
- to be rebuffed, multiple times, when you request an

informal resolution meeting with APS;

- to ultimately have to file for due process;
- to request formal mediation in one final attempt to avoid litigation  
only to find out after being strung along for a month, from the state mediation coordinator, that APS is declining;
- to have to file a petition in circuit court to force APS to comply with your subpoena even though you complied fully and on time with theirs;
- to worry about potential retribution for your child who remains in APS;
- to be bullied and slow-rolled by APS and their lawyers in an attempt to wear you down and get you to go away;
- to manage the unthinkable stress of due process while still trying to work full time and parent your children.

But we are one of the lucky ones.

Our daughter's transformation at McLean has been nothing short of dramatic. Academically. Socially. Emotionally. It will take us years to undo the damage caused by APS, but we're headed in the right direction.

Not everyone, however, is in the position to hire attorneys or pay \$50,000 per year for school. And none of us should have to.

Special Education in APS is broken. It is an enormous liability for the county and will only get worse once Amazon-related enrollment hits the system.

- An external ombudsman needs to be appointed to assess how deep the failures run and identify the root cause.
- A safe outlet needs to be established to capture violations; very few parents are comfortable speaking publicly and even fewer are able to pursue action against APS.
- A transparent plan needs to be put in place with a clearly established and communicated POC and timeline for change.
- Consequences need to be levied if milestones are met or missed just like any business would if significant problems were identified.

	<p>No other child should have to endure what mine did. No other family should have to suffer like we did for years. <u>APS needs to be held accountable.</u></p>	
<p>Clara Shriner</p>	<p>Hello, My name is Clara, I'm 10 and I HAVE ANXIETY. I have a twin brother named Nick, who has ADHD and dyslexia...among other things. We both struggled in focusing and enjoying school. Thankfully, we both now go to private schools that devote more attention and care than most public schools. We are lucky. But if someone is lucky, it means someone else has to be the unlucky one. No one wants to be the unlucky one. Sometimes, people CAN'T go to other schools. They deserve the help they need. Everyone is worthy of it.</p> <p>Imagine sitting underneath the sink of your 3-year old sister's bathroom, willing, wanting, waiting to never be found. Whatever that sticky stuff is getting in your hair, on your hands, in your knees. But never coming out. Because you can't. You can't get out if the first floor of the house is flooded. You can't get out if you heard there was a terrorist on the loose last seen in your area. You wouldn't dare get out of that closet, crammed in with the pipes, hearing the clamor downstairs because you are missing on a Tuesday morning when school starts in two hours. Finally you see your brother open the door, letting light flood in to your hiding place that you thought was reliable. Crying, because whatever you do, YOU CAN'T GO TO SCHOOL. YOU CANNOT AT ANY COST GO TO SCHOOL. It's not an overreaction, not to you at least.</p> <p>So many people suffer from anxiety, ADHD, dyslexia, autism, depression. And sometimes...its not identified. If you don't know what's wrong HOW do you FIX it?!?!</p> <p>APS teachers should be trained to not only know how to recognize, but TREAT these differences. With choices in how they learn, so many could improve. Not choices like, "There are two math games you can play. First there is penguin rush, where you practice multiplication using strategy X. But not any other strategy. Just X. So you can learn how to do that –" HOLD. UP. Well maybe SOME PEOPLE don't understand strategy X??? Could you maybe teach them ANOTHER STRATEGY that could help them associate the new strategy with the old one instead of waiting and waiting and waiting, and FORCING THEM to pretend to understand what's going on in that teacher's head. Or having them do reflex math, which largely impacts kids with the three second timers that don't give you enough time to think about the questions. This makes kids with slow processing, dysgraphia, and anxiety get upset about school because they feel they are not doing good enough and that people will be disappointed in them.</p> <p>I'm sure you've heard of growth mindset. Well, its something where you say things like I can't do this – yet. And trying to work harder to do it no matter what it takes. Maybe taking a break so you can learn something to help you understand better the thing</p>	

	<p>that may be confusing. APS needs to help teachers have some growth mindset like they teach their students to have. Its hypocritical!</p> <p>I suggest a training program, to help teachers understand better how they're making some of their students feel, and put themselves in the children's shoes. Also, another idea could be having a small mandatory course for teachers. It would let them know more about their students, without jumping to conclusions. I hope this was helpful. TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE IT WORK.</p>	
<p>Heather Wishart-Smith</p>	<p>Despite making public comments at ASEAC in March, and to the School Board in September, I have yet to see any action taken by APS to address SPED.</p> <p>In March I made public comments at ASEAC, and following very personal and emotional comments my husband and I made to the School Board in September, we had a call with Paul Jamelske and Cintia Johnson. Nothing was resolved, and no commitments were made to advance progress on our concerns. "I hear what you are saying, and thank you for sharing your concern" was the response to every point we raised, which included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We asked for improvements in professional development and training for teachers and administrators in early identification, intervention, and the 504/IEP process, and were told that professional development is important at APS.</li> <li>• We suggested that teachers and administrators, as the educational experts and ones who can compare students' relative achievements and deficiencies, need to be the ones to identify students who need help and refer them for Student Study. We were told that APS has processes in place for that. Processes, we note, that failed our son.</li> <li>• We requested a private meeting with them and parents who don't feel comfortable making public comments, and were told that processes are in place for parents to make public comments at ASEAC or School Board meetings. When I emphasized that some parents are uncomfortable making public comments, even anonymously, we were told that is the process available. That said, I have now made public comments in both forums, and have not seen any progress or commitment made to improve the SPED situation in APS, so I understand other parents' reluctance to share their stories if no action will result.</li> <li>• I urged Dr. Murphy to request a review of students with 504s and IEPs who have left Discovery since it opened. Anecdotally, we know if at least ten SPED students who have left for private special needs schools or APS schools, and suspect that the number is greater than</li> </ul>	

	<p>that. Looking into this metric and conducting interviews to find out why these students left would provide insight into the concerns related to SPED in APS, including those who do not feel comfortable coming forward publicly.</p> <p>I remain concerned that Arlington Public Schools continues to fail its Special Education students, that the processes in place for sharing concerns do not result in any action or commitment to improvement, and am left feeling disappointed and let down first that we moved to Arlington for the “excellent schools” and second, that we shared our very personal story on public record with absolutely no progress to show for it.</p> <p>We continue to urge APS administration and the School Board to address the systemic failures of SPED in Arlington with action items, owners, due dates, and a commitment to improving access to public education for all students in Arlington. To every point we have raised, we were thanked for our comment and told we were heard. It appears that the APS administration and the School Board intend to continue to slow roll their response to our concerns in the hopes that we get worn down and give up, as so many have before us. As I’ve said previously, we’ve had wonderful experience with SPED teachers, but our concern is that it took 2 ½ years of active advocacy for us to access them. This is time and resources that less fortunate families cannot afford. APS needs to conduct a systemic review of SPED issues in APS; address access to special education; conduct required training of administrators and educators; hold administrators accountable; and develop an effective avenue to express concerns and prompt action.</p>	
Leila Carney	<p>In the Spring of 2018 I had a transitional IEP meeting for my 5th grade son who is dyslexic and dysgraphic and has adhd. My goals for the meeting were to learn about Williamsburg, establish good relationship with its staff, get an impression of how my son would be supported, and to most of all be positive.</p> <p>Specific questions I had were to find out how sped support crosses subjects, specifically for writing, I also wanted to know about how keyboarding was taught, and I wanted to ask for him to be in Instructional Studies. I wanted to make goals that would really leave him prepared for less support in 7th grade, as I had heard that all kids were given a lot of support in 6th grade. I wanted to keep his current accommodations and learn whether other accommodations might be needed. I wanted to learn more about what they would recommend for a math level.</p> <p>Some data I wanted to share was that he was writing below grade level and I was interested in whether there was data regarding whether he was disorganized below grade level.</p> <p>The actual meeting went nothing like how I anticipated it going. The lead special ed teacher at Williamsburg told me that she</p>	

thinks dyslexia goes away and that reading at grade level Means he Does not have a reading need. I was troubled that she did not understand that dyslexia is a neurological condition that is permanent but can be remediated through consistent explicit instruction. She then suggested that my son receive OG For spelling, and LLI for reading. This did not make sense to me as LLI is not a data-driven tool for improving the reading of dyslexic. She suggested reconvening the IEP team midyear to reduce his words per minute reading goal If it appeared he would not meet it. I was frankly shocked at this suggestion.

I requested that he have a spelling accommodation of not marking off points for spelling errors, as I had heard from friends with older dyslexic children that this would be helpful. I noted that he cannot spell the word "when." She said that giving him a spelling accommodation would make it so that he did not care to apply the spelling he was learning. She said that grades would make him care. She gave the example that if he spelled hypothesis wrong in science, he should lose points, because that is what he is supposed to be learning. I reiterated that he cannot spell "when" and noted my concern that while he is very good at science he would be discouraged by losing points for misspelling "hypothesis" which he would likely be unable to spell even with sustained effort, because he's dyslexic and dysgraphic. She responded that if he "chooses" to spell words wrong, that's on him. She repeatedly asserted that spelling is not part of 6th grade curriculum.

After creating a complicated goal about using graphic organizers and writing a five paragraph essay, she declined my request to add anything about punctuation or conventions to the goal, because she said that would be far too challenging. I pointed out that I was concerned about the life skill of writing, giving the example that he cannot write a birthday card to grandma without substantial assistance. I suggested a simple goal regarding writing a sentence. She said he should just practice that at home every day.

In response to my request for a goal to organize his binder, she said a goal that he occasionally organize his binder would be too ambitious.

She repeatedly talked about how hard it would be to fit all the special ed time he needed into his schedule, stating that it would take all of Wolf time and possibly she would have to pull him from core subjects, and lunch.

When I asked her about how to balance his needs as a twice exceptional learner, she said that interventions take priority, of course, and he will not get any gifted services beyond what is integrated into the normal Classroom. I had asked the Nottingham GT teacher to attend in order to offer her opinion on how best to meet Kai's needs as an identified gifted student. She spoke up, but her contribution was ignored by the Williamsburg staff.

	<p>She did not appear to use or consider information provided by others at the meeting including his General Ed teacher and special ed teacher and gifted services teacher and mom. There was a counselor present from Williamsburg, but I don't think she said hardly a word the whole time. I did not feel like we were a team; I felt like this teacher was telling me how it was going to be.</p> <p>As for my other questions, I asked to discuss math, the subject in which he is gifted, and she said that his placement was not something we could discuss. I asked about keyboarding, and she said that they could place him in instructional studies, but in that case he could not take keyboarding. She did not acknowledge that learning keyboarding was relevant to his special ed needs, but treated it as if it were a general ed request for which there was no flexibility.</p> <p>I was so crushed by this meeting. At the time, I had applied to one private school for him, as I was worried that at Williamsburg he would fall further behind in the areas where he struggles and also not excel in the areas he has strengths in, because his weaknesses would get in the way. I was hoping and expecting this meeting to assuage my worries. My son had not yet been accepted to this school, so I was earnestly seeking the best supports for him, planning on him attending Williamsburg. I left the meeting bewildered. I had been told many things that I knew were wrong, and I had received the distinct impression that the lead special ed teacher did not understand his disabilities and needs, let alone his strengths. I went to the meeting thinking that whether to send him to private school would be a difficult decision, leaving his neighborhood school and friends and special ed supports. After this meeting, I simply hoped private school would be an option. I felt strongly that Williamsburg might be a place where my son would survive, but it was not a place where my son would thrive.</p>	
Nicole Davidson	<p>According to APS informational materials, the Secondary Program for Students with High Functioning Autism is located at HB Woodlawn, Washington-Lee and Yorktown (high schools). Wakefield Highschool does not house the program. I would like to understand why it does not.</p>	
Wendy Pizer (ASEAC Chair) –Updates		
	<p>ASEAC plans to compile public comments and pull themes from them to send to the School Board. We hope to get it out soon.</p> <p>Upcoming meetings: December 18, 2018, Dr. Murphy and staff from the Department of Teaching and Learning will come to discuss accountability for Special Education.</p>	
Paul Jamelske - Office of Special Education (OSE) Update		



- o Q&A:

- o Courtney Fox – it was my question about referral. For children who already have IEPs with dyslexia who are being denied OG at Nottingham, which is the unnamed school in question, what should they do?

- o Heather Wishart-Smith - Other parent commenter from last meeting - other school in question is Discovery. She attended the Zones of Regulation for one session because she thought it had ended. No one told her it kept going for two more months so her child did not know to go and no one let the child know to keep attending.

Paul Jamelske:

- o We have been providing additional professional development at that particular school that was the subject of the first comment – regarding to referral, identification, eligibility assessment process. Several schools have received additional training on how to interpret data for eligibility purposes. Needs can be academic or social, emotional, or behavioral. Students who haven't been identified with a disability can still access interventions through the ATSS process, including Orton-Gillingham and the ZONES program for social-emotional regulation.

- o Concerns regarding transition IEP meetings (e.g., elementary to middle school): Two different school teams will overlap with the student's IEP. We want to make sure the IEP is well-crafted for the new setting. We have been discussing transition IEP meetings with Directors of Counseling, secondary Assistant Principals, and the middle and high school special education department chairs. We shared talking points on best practices for transition IEPs. If a student has complex needs, there may need to be multiple meetings to ensure a smooth transition, including meetings at both the sending and the receiving schools.

- o We also discussed access to World Language and advanced classes, with appropriate supports for SWD.

- o The Secondary program for Students with Autism (SPSA) at HBW and Jefferson for middle schools, and W-L, Yorktown, and HBW for high school. In response to the inquiry why the SPSA is not available at Wakefield, we do want to support students in their neighborhood school

	<p>whenever possible. The components of the SPSA are available at Wakefield, including social skills classes and IEP case management.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>o Budget planning factors question – all of the planning factors for the past ten years are posted on the Budget and Finance page. We were alerted by ASEAC that some of the special education planning factors for special programs were different from FY18 to FY19. We aren't sure if that was a mistake. Have been trying to get more information from the finance department on how and why this happened. Should have more information by the next meeting.</li><li>o We are working with staff to post responses to questions that are posed in past ASEAC meeting minutes and to post them on the website.</li><li>o Paul also discussed the Stratford temporary move to Reed and how three of the Stratford students opted to go to Yorktown. He also spoke about a public comment from the September 2018 meeting about the lack of extended day options at Yorktown or transportation for students at Yorktown to access extended day at a different location. He said it possibly could exist, but has not previously been considered. If a significant need exists, it could be considered.</li><li>o In January Kelly Krug will discuss student support. Paul believes this will address many public comments over the past year.</li><li>o Some schools still currently do not have full time speech language pathologists (SLPs), but they have coverage in a patchwork way right now.</li><li>o The state measures 14 special education indicators at the county level. The Indicator data is not available disaggregated, school-by-school within APS.</li></ul>	
PCG – Evaluation of APS Special Education and 504 Services		

	<p>PCG set up a special email address that goes just to them (<a href="mailto:APSSpecialEducationReview@pcgus.com">APSSpecialEducationReview@pcgus.com</a>). Nadia Facey and Regina Van Horne introduced PCG (the contractor conducting the evaluation for APS). Jennifer Miller (PCG) presented an overview of who they are, a timeline of the evaluation, and discussion.</p> <p>PCG is using a 5 phase methodology:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Project Initiation (July 2018),</li> <li>2. Customize Approach (July-August 2018),</li> <li>3. Collect and Analyze Data (September 2018-January 2019),</li> <li>4. Develop Useful Reports (February – August 2019),</li> <li>5. Action Planning, Risk Assessment, and Implementation (September 2019)</li> </ol> <p>After the presentation by PCG, there was a question and answer period about surveys, data, response, and a Spanish speaking focus group. To expand on data they are looking at, a key piece is demographics and quantifiable information and achievement levels.</p> <p>Will Gordillo (PCG) had everyone break into small groups utilizing the World Café Method. We had meaningful conversation in small groups.</p>	
Meeting Adjourned	Meeting Adjourned at 9, working groups continued to meet after adjournment	

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, December 18th 2018 from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.  
 Syphax Education Center, 2110 Washington Blvd, Room 456, Arlington, VA 22204