

**Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee
Minutes
January 21, 2020**

Members Present:

Nadia Facey (Chair), Margy Dunn (Co-secretary), Amber Baum, Michele Best, Jay Hamon, Matt Leland, Wendy Pizer (Past Chair), Sonia Rosen, Kurt Schuler, Tauna Szymanski, Paul Timm

Members Absent:

David Rosenblatt (Co-secretary), Nick Walkosak (Vice Chair), Keith Chanon, Caitlin Davies (Teacher Member), Kristin Gillig, Jennifer Johnson, Ella Robertson (Student), Minerva Trudo, Symone Walker, Cristina Yacobucci,

Staff:

Dr. Kelly Krug (Director of Special Education – Elementary),
Heather Rothenbuescher (Director of Special Education – Secondary),
Kathleen Donovan (Parent Resource Center),
Kelly Mountain (Parent Resource Center)

Guests:

Monique O’Grady (School Board), Justin Boatner (student with autism, Arlington Career Center & PEP, Arlington Student Advisory Board), Janna Dressel (SEPTA president), Natalie Goldring (ACI liaison), Kathy Pericak (Yorktown/HB parent), Cecilia Spellman

AGENDA:

Agenda Items	Discussion/Decisions	What to do/who/when
Welcome		
7:05PM Nadia Facey	Welcome and introductions	
Public Comments		
Nadia Facey	<p>All of us in this room recognize the critical role special education assistants play in the daily lives of student with disabilities. I’m here tonight to share concerns about what happens when special education assistants are absent. Both of my children have IEPs and as a way to meet their needs in the classroom APS relies on special education assistants.</p> <p>One of my children works with a special education assistant who is often absent. This lack of consistency results in an inconsistent educational experience for my child.</p>	

	<p>In addition to absences being a challenge for students, just as importantly this also has a negative impact on the greater school community. For reasons unknown to me special education assistants are not able to call into the "APS Sub Line." When they are absent the school is left scrambling at the last minute to ensure all students' needs are met and as a result staff are sometimes pulled away from other important work. My child's case carrier has done an excellent job trying to meet needs the best they can, but this isn't an acceptable system.</p> <p>I'm also concerned that the majority of special education assistants in APS do not receive benefits, despite working over 30 hours a week, one could surmise there is less incentive to be at work due to a lack of benefits which can further exacerbate absences.</p> <p>I have shared these concerns with administration and staff at my child's school. Like other parents, I generally have additional concerns about special education assistants primarily around ensuring they have the training they need to be successful in the classroom. But tonight, I'd really just like to hear back from APS about why special education assistants can't use the sub line, and ideally if there would be a way to fix that and why they don't qualify for benefits and of course ideally a way to remedy this as well. Thank you in advance for your time.</p>	
<p>Jenn Seiff</p>	<p>Statement to ASEAC 1/25/2020</p> <p>From: Jennifer Seiff</p> <p>RE: ADA Challenges at Fleet</p> <p>Dear ASAEC Members,</p> <p>I presented the attached testimony to the Fleet PTA on January 14, 2020. I wanted to make sure that the ASEAC community was aware of these issues, some of which I voiced to ASEAC in September 2019. All of Fleet's shortcomings are a learning opportunity for Arlington County's other facilities.</p> <p>The full text of my comments to the Fleet PTA is attached for your review. What follows is an overview of the key points.</p> <p>Executive Summary</p> <p>The Fleet facility has been lauded as an example of our community's commitment to green and sustainable construction. Unfortunately, this brand new building has major shortcomings with respect to handicap accessibility and ADA compliance. It falls well short of our community's ideals for inclusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evacuation – insufficient design and planning for emergency evacuation of non-ambulatory staff, students and teachers. • First Responder Communication – "shelter in place" protocol (which was an afterthought) not accompanied by signage/flashing lights/two way communication for impacted stakeholders • Parking – no handicapped parking available in front of the building 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curb cuts – insufficient ramps for street level access • Elevators – the only existing handicapped spaces are in the garage, which is accessible only by locked elevator (not useable for parents/students). The garage elevator is not part of the backup generator system, leaving wheelchair users stranded in the event of a power outage. • Classroom access – Outdoor (rooftop) classroom has no ramp, only steps on the threshold • Playground accessibility – the playground area is not accessible by wheelchair (entirely mulch) and does not include any equipment that can be used by individuals with mobility or balance challenges <p>There are viable solutions for all of these issues available today. It is unfortunate that we've spent nearly \$50MM on a building that does not address the needs of the community it serves. Please have a look at the full text of my talk, attached. Thanks.</p> <p>Jenn Seiff</p>	
	<p>Jenn Seiff's handout:</p> <p>Thank you for enabling me to speak with you this evening. My name is Jenn Seiff. I'm a mother of two boys – one here at Fleet. I'm also a disabilities advocate and the SEPTA (Special Education PTA) liaison for Fleet. LJ is a student in the Communications program here.</p> <p>I am here to make you aware of two issues which are critical to students with special needs like LJ, but actually affect all students, staff and visitors to Alice West Fleet Elementary.</p> <p>First - as we sit in this beautiful, new \$47.5 million dollar school that is praised for its "green" and environmentally friendly design, it is woefully deficient from the human perspective. The limited attention paid to ADA design and detail is shocking. It may meet minimum standards, but certainly not the kind of high standards we expect from APS. The deficiencies create a less than welcoming environment for all who attend, work in or visit. We can understand convoluted ramps and work-arounds in older retrofitted schools, but deficiencies in a brand new, state-of-the-art building should not be tolerated.</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>Why was this site designed with no handicapped parking spaces near the entrance and why are there insufficient curb cuts to enable wheel chair users to enter and exit Fleet?</p> <p>The only easily accessible entrance and exit for a wheel chair is through the garage. The elevator is locked and requires a staff member with a key card to unlock it. This elevator is not covered by the building's backup generator. In case of a power outage or if that elevator is broken it would be very difficult for a mobility-impaired person to enter and exit the building let alone access their car. We face an inconvenient, cumbersome and somewhat humiliating process each time we drive our son to school or pick him up early to go to therapy appointments. Frankly, we did much better in this regard at the old, outdated Patrick Henry campus.</p> <p>Lest you think we are alone, let me share a tweet from Joel W, which I saw on Dec 18, the night of our school concert:</p>	

“After hours event handicapped accessibility is terrible. There are no on street handicapped spots. The garage has an elevator but it’s locked out. I had to wheel up the very steep garage entrance for tonight’s concert. I’m terrified of going back d I well know the car ramp he mentions and he had every right to be terrified to use it! We had an identical experience at Back to School Night. What a terrible message Fleet School is sending to community visitors!

Good ADA plans are designed to help individuals with challenges be more independent and better able to integrate into the larger community. Fleet’s design does the opposite. By making special needs individuals go through hoops to accomplish simple tasks like entering and exiting a building we are sending poor messages to all who visit this school.

What was the thinking behind placing the Communications program with special needs students and the accessible bathroom on the upper levels of the building? This mistake has caused huge issues with regard to evacuation in an emergency. I will tell you more about that in just a minute.

Who designed all of the playgrounds so that the surfaces and every single piece of equipment are totally inaccessible for mobility-impaired children? Surely, the architects and planners knew about universal design concepts which create spaces that everyone can use and enjoy. It would be nice if even one of the play areas had the kind of ground surface or inclusive play equipment where differently-abled students could “hang out” with friends at recess.

Why is it that Arlington has not learned from our Fairfax neighbors? Fairfax County schools have placards with a handicapped sign and flashing green lights that activate during evacuations, posted in appropriate locations on the outside of their buildings. That makes it easy for first responders to quickly locate special needs individuals, whether students or staff, who are “sheltering in place.” While our County Fire and Rescue personnel are experts, we should be doing everything we can to make their job easier and our children and staff safer. Why aren’t similar signs being used at Fleet?

There are other deficiencies, but I am sure you get the idea. This school was not built with a real attempt to be welcoming and accessible to everyone. The planners gave lip service to ADA design while focusing on the hot ticket items that would win awards.

Some of these problems can be resolved with little cost. Others might require substantial funding. If we can spend almost 50 million dollars on a new school the County can certainly find several thousands more to make corrections.

That brings me to the second critical issue with regard to making this school welcoming and inclusive. We need a willingness to recognize and own the problems and creative “can do” leadership on the part of our Arlington County Public School administrators. Thus far, that has been sorely lacking.

Generally speaking, when administrators are asked about problems, they seem to blame someone else. The facility design is not their fault, but, as leaders, they are not taking responsibility and ownership.

Let me give one example that has consumed most of my time this past fall. By way of explanation, LJ has Cerebral Palsy. He also has visual impairments and is non-verbal. But he is able to get around using a power wheel chair and speaks using a speech-generating device. He is cognitively alert and acutely aware of his surroundings.

Long prior to the start of school I was concerned about my son’s safety as he transitioned from a one-level to a multi-level school building, especially once I

learned that his classes would be on the upper levels of the school. After three attempts (initiated in July) my email was answered when Fleet leadership emailed me back on August 17th. They didn't know what the evacuation plan would be – with school opening only a few days away. Long story short and upon trying to navigate the proper channels such as meetings with the newly-appointed Emergency Manager for APS, LJ and I meeting with our School Board Member and writing a letter about the situation to the Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee we were still frustrated and concerned. In response to those efforts we received a copy of the School Board Follow-Up Report on October 7th. Answers were vague and evasive. The letter stated that “Shelter locations are known and established at each school location” but that was not the case at Fleet! (2 weeks into school leadership still didn't have the architectural renderings)

We met with the Interim Superintendent for Special Education and the Emergency Manager for APS on November 14th. They rejected our suggestion to install stair chairs in the school, citing costs which were far in excess of what we learned when we did some research. At that meeting we finally received a letter with more explicit evacuation plans for non-ambulatory people. Administration said a staff training would be given by the Fire Chief at the school on November 21.

A month later on December 20 there was a real evacuation. At the time of the drill LJ was working with a specialist he is assigned to - a county-based staff member. She had not been trained. Instead of going to the shelter-in-place location he was brought to the stairwell, a back-up location. The fire alarm was blaring. LJ, using his assistive technology device, asked his chaperone to get his noise canceling headphones, so he was spared from the worst of the alarm sound. His chaperone was not so fortunate and I suspect could easily file an OSHA complaint for enduring many minutes of ear-splitting noise while in the stairwell. Picture your child or yourself with LJ's impairments watching all the able-bodied students evacuate, while being stuck in the stairwell for 30 minutes.

We received the email sent to Fleet families stating “all students and staff safely evacuated.” That stung – not quite right “two were still in the building.” What if there had been smoke in the stairwell or the sprinkler system had activated? Would they have been safe? Would the chaperone have stayed with LJ? I continue to be worried, although real emergencies are few and far between.

You can understand my concern about the lack of leadership and the length of time it took for any plan to be activated. I did everything I could to get administration moving, but so far as I know all of our children were in this school for almost two months before there was even an attempt to have an evacuation drill. Is that acceptable?

In closing, as the liaison to this organization from the Special Education PTA, I ask:

- that the PTA request the administration to do a thorough review of the ways in which ADA compliance at Fleet can be improved. This may involve bringing in planners and consultants. Perhaps the original architects and planners should be taken to task.
- that the PTA request wheelchair placards on the exterior of Shelter in Place rooms (4th floor), (3rd floor) and (2nd floor) to quickly alert emergency personnel to each shelter location
- that this PTA request the Arlington County School administration at the school level and beyond show greater and more timely leadership in solving problems at Fleet which ultimately affect the health, safety and dignity of all students

	<p>-that the PTA, school administration and staff at Fleet commit to work harder to create an environment at this school which is safe, welcoming, accessible and inclusive for every student, staff member and visitor Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer questions if time permits.</p>	
<p>Dr.Kelly Krug, Heather Rothenbuescher – Office of Special Education Updates</p>		
<p>7:10</p>	<p>Responses to Comments from December meeting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heather Rothenbuescher (HR) read response from School Board Chair Talento re Transportation Needs of Students with Disabilities dated 12/17/2019: <p>Dear Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee (ASEAC):</p> <p>Thank you for writing to the School Board regarding transportation needs of students with disabilities. Your letter dated December 17, 2019 was received by the Board.</p> <p>The Interim Superintendent is working with staff in response to the issues addressed on the December 17 letter. We will follow up again soon.</p> <p>If you have any questions or additional concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the Board.</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Tannia Talento School Board Chair Arlington Public Schools Phone: 703-228-6015 Email: school.board@apsva.us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kelly Krug (KK) and HR had a meeting w ELT and Transportation – working to address the issues and have a meeting later this week to discuss medical needs of students on special ed and general ed buses to develop a system and a training. Really productive meeting with a lot of people at the table. Agreed APS needs a system in place. Lawyer was in attendance at this meeting. Moving forward with a plan and a process in the right direction. Monique thanked Nadia for bringing forth the letter and that we are moving towards a solution. While figuring a long term electronic goal, can start with paper copies of pertinent info in a secure location on the bus. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Comment from Justin Boatner who is on SAP – they have been discussing w transportation about this issue. He said the shortage of bus drivers is a big part of the problem. <p>OSE Update</p>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PCG coming for a meeting next week. Will keep us posted on what comes of that. • Submitted a budget request. • 3 policies recently went forward to SB, they were ammendments that needed to move forward quickly due to federal compliance. The rest of the process is still remaining the same. All were paused until new T&L Assistant Superintendent started. Process is that HR and KK will receive policies when in draft review format and then they will forward to stakeholders. The 3 that went forward didn't come through them and they have not received any more at the moment. • Restraint and Seclusion – still working on the process, hopefully will help once in an electronic system. Every incident is sent to their office on paper right now for their data collection and analysis. Ironing out the process and making forward progress. Time, location, who was there, etc. is being reported. In the next few weeks it will be available in Synergy. Have the number of incidents but would need to count all the reports that are in paper format now. Family should be informed day of if there is R or S. Parents don't currently have access to the reports but they can get details. • Nadia asks for the actual R&S incident count. Also asks for parents to get the actual reports. • Natalie asks why reports aren't sent to the parents. Heather says there is no policy requiring reports to be sent to parents. • Student comment: Only times I've seen restraint used is in the MIPA program at Wakefield, every once in a while. The seclusion room is not implemented in a lot of schools. Only schools that have seclusion rooms are Jefferson and Stratford Program. They are rarely used. • Kelly: This is the first time we are systematically collecting this data and there's no reason why parents shouldn't have access. Would be great if it were on ParentVUE. • Sonia: Will it be in a language that parents understand? For example, Spanish, not just plain language. 	Deleted: '
ASEAC UPDATE		
7:28pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Margy Dunn motioned to adopt minutes, Kurt Schuler seconded. 12 voted to approve Dec 2019 minutes. • ACI Recs for SB Work Session 2019-2020. 1 page ASEAC recs for ACI shown on smartboard. Should be covered in PCG report plus should help all students not just SWD. Nadia and Nick will be there to present these. ASEAC should present around 8/830. S Rosen commented about the ACI Rec document, that while she agrees with the two recs, without proper professional development training for the teachers, none of this matters. Without a sentence in there about that, they don't know and she wants it to be included. N Facey had requested assistance with writing and editing the document before the meeting 	

	<p>tonight since we are voting to approve now. Matt Leland motions to approve, M Dunn seconded it. The vote was 10 yes, 1 no.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation Letter – will try to ask them to come to the April ASEAC meeting. They are having meetings now and training at the end of the month, so hopefully by April they can have some progress to present. If anyone has anything they want to address with them specifically, let Nadia know. Hoping they can present and then have a Q&A. • Nick not in attendance, so no policy update aside from what KK mentioned in OSE Updates. Please contact Nick if you are interested in assisting him with policy reviews. • Goals for 2019-2020, topics to cover. Showed a slide with Agenda Topics for remaining 2019-2020, things we are monitoring, communications to SB, follow up on, what else? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ S Rosen brought up topic of teaching Math, esp for those with language based disabilities. Feels there needs to be intensive focus on that and it is a big unknown for a lot of teachers. KK said they brought in Marilyn Zecher (pioneer of multi-sensory approach for math) and trained math coaches, teachers and co teachers to build capacity like we are doing with OG. Approaches and strategies are good not just for those w dyslexia etc but for all students. Trying to build a model that other teachers can see and learn from. At SS level it is lacking but at ES and MS working on it. There is not a math coach in SS, so structure isn't the same as ES and MS. ○ SR – Strengthened public approach Teaching math and assessing math knowledge. • Reaching out to Facilities to join us at a meeting too, as well as Aaron Gregory and Bridget Loft to say hi and introduce themselves. Working with SEPTA on this. • Program Evaluation – PCG will be here for action planning this month. Will pass on the info at upcoming meetings. Our working group chairs will be present at the action planning (Amber B. and Kathy P.) • ASEAC Letters and APS Communications – Lisa Stengle Letter on Boundaries and Countywide Programs still in progress; Fleet playground and building accessibility – Fleet PTA is working on a letter that will be sent to SB, ASEAC, etc, so we aren't going to be working on a document about accessibility at this time. • Superintendent Search – ACI Committee Member Sessions on January 23, 2020 at 830AM, 452-454; Thurs Jan 23, 2020 at 6PM, 452-454; Friday Jan 24 at 7PM rooms 254-256. Want to have ASEAC coverage at all 3 ACI meetings if we can. Try and come with concise plan/information for what you are looking for in a candidate. 	
WORKING GROUP MEETING TIME		
8:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the groups that want to report out at the end of the year, they can, but it won't be required and forced to be separate appendices for each Working Group. Try and keep things short so it can be read. • Broke out into the different working groups for the remainder of the meeting. 	

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Meeting Adjourned	Meeting Adjourned at 9pm	

NEXT MEETING: Tuesday, February 25 from 7:00 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.
Syphax Education Center, 2110 Washington Blvd, Room 456, Arlington, VA 22204