

Arlington Special Education Advisory Committee

Minutes

June 30, 2020

First Name	Last Name	Present?	Vote on minutes Feb and May
Nicholas	Walkosak	yes	Y y
David	Rosenblatt	yes	Y y
Amber	Baum	yes	Y y
Keith	Chanon	yes	Y y
Nadia	Facey	yes	Y y
Jason	Love	yes	Y y
Tauna	Szymanski	yes	Abstain Abstain
Margaret	Dunn	yes	Y y
Michelle	Best	yes	Y y
Kristin	Gillig	yes	Y y
Kurt	Schuler	yes	Y y
Minerva	Trudo	yes	Y y
Cristina	Yacobucci	yes	Y y
Sonia	Rosen	yes	Y y
Matt	Leland	yes	Y y

Paul	Timm	no	- -
Symone	Walker	yes	Y y
Kathryn	Pericak	yes	Y y
David	Siu	yes	Y y

Members Present: 18

Members Absent: Paul Timm

APS Staff (5): Dr Francisco Duran (superintendent), 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 (at least 28--names taken from Zoom participant list, 7 incomplete): Reade Bush, Aaron Fuchs, Alison Cassels, Amanda Shapiro, Amy Miller, Ana Judith Montalvo, Anna Highberger, Caitlin Davies, Charles Smith, Christy Vigfusson, Cristina Meaney, Courtney Fox, Elena Fernsler, Elizabeth Fabrizio, Heather Ness, Heather Wishart-Smith, Janna Dressel, Kathleen Clark, Michael Ness, Natalie Goldring, Sarah Carr, Vicki Taylor, Jennifer Crain

AGENDA:

Agenda Items	Discussion/Decisions
Welcome	
7:00PM	Welcome and introductions Nick welcomed participants and described meeting procedures.
Public Comments	
Reade Bush	Dr. Duran, Welcome to Arlington and thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to join us tonight. My name is Reade Bush. My wife and I have 2 special needs children with IEPs at Tuckahoe, one going into 2nd grade, the

other 3rd grade. One has cerebral palsy, and intellectual disability, and expressive and receptive speech disorders. The other has complex ADHD and autism.

Home schooling them for the last 3 months has been very hard. Even though my wife used to teach elementary school, we are not trained in teaching to their needs. We are very concerned about the Fall for several reasons.

1. The proposed structure to re-open seems to be geared toward typical kids and not kids with special needs.

2. Our kids cannot do distance learning without us helping them **at all times**. For example, just with an Ipad, we have to constantly keep our kids from hitting a button which shuts the screen down. They also lack the focus and executive functioning skills needed for remote learning.

3. Both of our kids are very behind with social-emotional learning. It is impossible for them to progress in these areas or meet their social-emotional IEP goals over a Microsoft Teams meeting. We are very concerned they will fall further behind with only 2 days of school per week.

4. Each of our kids has very different learning needs. My wife has worked very hard since school closed to keep them from falling behind, but when one child is having multiple meltdowns per day and the other one loses all focus when the other child is melting down, teaching them at home is next to impossible.

5. Due to our kids' needs, teaching them is impacting our relationships with them. **It is hard to be both parent and teacher for kids with significant special needs.** We do not qualify for any special services or respite through the County - all of their services come from the schools. During the Spring closure, they got no OT services and only 30 minutes of speech; the APS has already told us they are owed compensatory services. There is no way these missed hours can be made up in the Fall given the proposed schedule.

Moving forward, we feel that our kids would be served better by going to school 4 days per week, even if they are half days. This would give them more consistency and structure. We also would like to know how their IEP hours will be met with the reduced schedule and with remote learning.

Overall, we feel typical kids will be able to weather these changes and likely catch up in the long run. However, kids with significant IEP hours will only continue to fall behind and will be set up for long term struggles given the proposed plan for the Fall. While APS has continued to mention the need for equity for all students in learning, there is no equity when a child with special needs who cannot learn remotely is expected to do so.

Thank you for hearing our concerns.

Wendy Pizer

Good evening and thank you very much to Superintendent Duran for being here.

I have two kids, both of whom are at higher risk for Covid, and one also has an IEP. As I ponder the fall, I feel that our family has no good options. My kids cannot return to school safely without universal mask wearing, at the very least. It's the first thing their doctor asked about, and masks are required in all other indoor places.

A "recommendation" or an "expectation" to wear a mask is not enough -- that makes it optional. Safety should not be optional.

Tonight's School Talk message was encouraging but messaging on masks has not been very clear. Please provide clear and consistent communications that masks are REQUIRED for all students and staff at all times in buildings and on buses, not just for staff and not just when less than six feet apart.

Provide appropriate exceptions of course for people who cannot wear masks for developmental, medical or disability reasons.

If APS does not put adequate safety protections in place in schools, such as requiring masks, my kids will be automatically relegated to distance learning. But the distance learning options look isolating and depressing. During the shutdown in the spring, at least everyone was in it together. Kids were still with their own teachers and classmates. As best I can tell, this will not be the case this fall.

I do not see how students in distance learning will be able to maintain any connections to their school communities. High school students will not even have live contact with other students or teachers, and they won't even be taught by APS teachers.

For my son with an IEP, I have no information as to whether he will even be supported during the 3 days at home in hybrid, or at all in distance learning.

In the IEP process, we were told:

- Difficulties students experienced during distance learning do not count for IEPs;
- IEP teams are not allowed to write in supports for distance learning; and
- Teams need to write IEPs for in-building instruction only.

I have been asking about this for months and I don't understand how this can still be APS's position. Now that fall plans have been released, we know that all students are going to be learning from home either full or part time. APS has an obligation to support students with disabilities in whatever setting they are in.

These problems are fixable. I ask APS to please fix them so that families are not forced to choose between our children's health or their education.

Kayla Owen

I am speaking today as the mother of a twice exceptional, Arab-American child, who as a military brat has lived in 4 states in the last 5 years, and is just now entering 4th grade.

I would like to start by saying, the first 18 months we had at Mckinley were great, we had teachers who were certified to work with both special ed and gifted students, however this year was different. We had a teacher that was not qualified to teach gifted or special needs students and it was a disaster. From her flat out denying his disability, despite him receiving early intervention since the age of 14 mos, a diagnosis of autism at the age of 2, and consistent ABA therapy since that time. In addition, the lead at our eligibility meeting stated that both IEP's and 504 plans provided the same protection under the law. It was a year that as a family we joke it took an "act of God" to get my son out of this class. Given this history, it should surprise no one that we did not receive any check ins or a single minute of services throughout the Spring of 2020.

I want to provide some pre Covid context: When I began raising concerns about my sons education after two IEP meetings within the first 2.5 months of school, things quickly escalated and when I took things to the county level after exhausting options at the school level, I too raised retaliation as a concern at my first meeting with Dr. Krug and Ms. Pilch, and both my child and myself have continued to be on the receiving end of retaliation from Principal Brown and his teacher since that time. While every instance of bullying and exclusion raised has been whittled down and called a "misunderstanding" by APS, I am painfully aware that ours is not an isolated experience.

For some context McKinley elementary has the lowest IEP % in the county, at just over 7%, whereas the national average is 11-13%. McKinley was once ranked 5 in the state and has recently slid to 18 on several school ranking websites because of the school's reputation for mishandling students with disabilities. The school has slid from a 75% pass rate for students with disabilities to 50% from last year to this year based on data from the APS website.

I am requesting the county open an investigation into the following specifics at McKinley Elementary:

- The reason that McKinley has the lowest IEP ratio in the county (half of the national average)
- The number of students who are moved from an IEP to 504 plan, and if the data each individual student actually supports that.
- For students who have IEP/504 plans that have left McKinley, has their reasoning had to do with bullying or retaliation specific to the student and/or parents as they raised concerns.

-The reasons for teachers & special education teachers leaving McKinley and if those teachers had ever filed formal complaints with the county, teachers union or otherwise against Principal Brown.

-An anonymous parent survey for ALL parents at Mckinley asking if they have ever felt bullied by Mr. Brown or their students teacher after raising concerns.

It would likely be helpful to ask other special education parents at other schools if they too have faced retaliation when concerns have been raised. Or if they felt pressured to move from an IEP to a 504 plan.

As we are all aware from the special education consultant report from the fall, there are significant issues specific to special education in Arlington. I am aware there are families that are afraid of speaking out and afraid of retaliation. I am aware these experiences are not necessarily isolated to Mckinley. The discontinuity from teacher to teacher, year to year and school to school is very alarming and it leaves parents feeling that their options are to either pay lawyers or pay for private school. Despite these issues being brought forth and awareness of these longstanding issues, it appears that rather than improve these issues have gotten worse.

I come to you today not as an APS parent, but as the parent of two children who have left APS due to its failure to provide a FAPE for students with disabilities. I will not rehash our sad story of depression, anxiety and personal harm because of their APS experience - I did that several years ago in public comments where looks of shock and horror, along with tears, resulted. Fortunately, my children are now in private schools at our expense, and thriving.

But most families do not have the privilege of spending \$25-50K a year on a school that will meet their needs. And that is why I continued my advocacy for years, even after I withdrew my two school-aged children. Because my heart breaks for the students who are stuck in a public school system where their needs are not identified, and the services they are legally entitled to are not provided. Research shows that the mental health and criminal justice systems are filled with students whose educational needs were not met.

And that is why I spearheaded an effort to identify the deficiencies in APS long after my son and daughter left. Trying to improve the system for those who remain, I met and tried to work with school administrators for over a year.

Heather L
Wishart-Smith

When that didn't work, I made public comments at ASEAC and to the School Board.

When that didn't work, I met with Arlington County administrators.

When that didn't work, I contacted VDOE staff and the ombudsman to try to resolve widespread, systemic issues experienced by myriad families.

When the VDOE ombudsman recommended that we file a complaint, I wrote and spearheaded a letter signed by 13 families, and supported behind the scenes by others who were unable or too fearful of reprisal to sign on. We did this after spending 2 1/2 years working within the system, starting at the local level and continuing on up, but getting nowhere.

Imagine my surprise when the VDOE threw out our complaint for having been outside the one year mark, and imagine my surprise when the ombudsman, who had recommended we file a complaint, told me she could no longer assist because we had filed.

And imagine my continued surprise when the Director of the Office of Dispute Resolution chastised me for filing the complaint, rather than pursue mediation that had been neither mentioned nor offered.

I spoke with Secretary of Education Qarni who promised a review. My hope turned to continued disappointment months later, when he responded with inaccurate information about outreach and actions that hadn't occurred, and only after multiple requests for updates by me.

APS and VDOE have not been compliant with the IDEA or Section 504, and far too many students and their families have suffered as a result. Our concerns were validated by the US DOE with a letter of noncompliance issued last week. (https://www2.ed.gov/fund/data/report/idea/partbdmsrpts/dms-va-b-2020-letter.pdf?fbclid=IwAR03BBR-9li_oIsX2S3TNgLABQPsuNLaiGSjCF9zR1O8WOZ2o2B5eshDXF8).

My experience, and that of many others, is that special education is broken in APS and that the systemic negligence we have experienced here extends to the VDOE. Superintendent Duran – we are glad you are here, but you have your work cut out for you to restore a fair and appropriate public education and importantly, our trust.

Heather Ness

Students with disabilities need four days a week at a minimum. She's being asked to lock in private OT and speech this week, but APS is saying we won't know until the week before school works. I'm a single working mom with a special needs son and I need to make those arrangements. Need to know whether Extended Day will be an option as well. Stand behind Reade's comments as well.

<p>Christy Vigfusson</p>	<p>Although teachers and administrators made the best of a difficult situation in Spring 2020, distance learning did not work well for my children. I have heard from a number of other families with similar problems. As such, I am asking that, for the 2020-21 school year, APS put in place more face to face options for students with disabilities at the elementary level.</p> <p>Elementary-aged students on IEPs that face challenges with focus and social emotional regulation need more than check ins and Teams calls to stay on track and progress. If these students are going to make progress on learning to read and write, APS must find creative ways to support them with more actual face time with their instructors and peers.</p> <p>I'd also like to add that I believe we are doing a disservice to our elementary students that qualified for summer school by being at least a grade behind grade level to not actually offer any instruction, but only check ins. If I were in that situation, I would feel like a drowning person being thrown a brick. I hope that we can do better for all of our students going forward.</p>
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AGENDA ITEM - OSE

<p>Dr. Duran Q&A</p>	<p>Appreciates the opportunity to be at ASEAC and would like to be able to attend all ASEAC meetings. Sent out additional School Talk message this evening with additional information.</p> <p>Priorities: Health and safety and instruction.</p> <p>How to meet needs of our students?</p> <p>Students and staff will be “required” to wear masks. APS is purchasing masks and will be mindful of students who are hard of hearing.</p> <p>Health and safety is the primary requirement for returning to school. Recognizes that instruction will not be what it needs to be during the pandemic. Will outline more tomorrow on the Engage Website.</p> <p>New content will be delivered.</p> <p>Hybrid approach: 2 days in school and 2 days virtual. Important during in-person days to provide special instruction and new content. Dr. Duran welcomes ideas for how to do this most effectively.</p>
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Recognizes that APS has challenges, even when students are full-time in school (5-days/wk). Requests suggestions for how to make things better.

Social and emotional learning. 1 hour/day in-person when in school. 3.5 hrs/day of synchronous instruction.

Need to think in particular, what SWDs and EL students need.

Kelly Krug: IEP requirements will need to be met. Will make adjustments as needed for virtual meeting. Things will look different than in the spring. Will include explicit instruction.

C Fox: Is 3.5 hours a day of synchronous learning in the FT distance model for HS too?

Heather: Virtual VA - Considering a coaching model. Will consider a variety of models. Can't commit to a standard instruction time for everyone.

Kelly: Instruction, to extent possible, will be in small groups. Recognize that 1:1 instruction may be needed at some times, but will encourage small group instruction.

Heather: Doing best to provide more certainty regarding school hours and services.

Duran: IEP teams will meet when school resumes. Will need to discuss how best to meet IEP goals.

Kelly: Students will receive direct services for both models (all virtual or hybrid). 504 teams can meet when school opens and to consider additional accommodations.

Duran: After July 20th, families can still make changes. For general education students, changes can be made based on the capacity of space. For SWDs, will be much more flexible in changing models. The July 20th date will not exclude the needs of SWDs.

Question on inclusion and equity/consistency across APS. How will they be measured in the fall?

Heather: Expectations will be well defined to ensure consistency.

How will staff be supported?

Kelly: Working with Zack Pope to ensure proper sanitation, safety protocols and equipment will be provided.

Duran: All questions can be sent to the Engage site. Would like to add questions for FAQs.

Can IEP teams meet over the summer? How will so many IEP meetings happen in the fall (logistically)?

Heather: Barrier is that many IEP team members are on summer break.

ASEAC: Encourage APS to take steps to address IEP needs without convening the entire IEP team.

Duran: Much easier to change from hybrid to distance model. Other way around may be more difficult.

OSE Updates and May Comments

- Fall opening options were shared at the last school board meeting
 - Hybrid
 - Full Distance Learning
- Parents will get a survey via ParentVue on July 6 will have until July 20 to state your preference.
 - Two days/week of in-person instruction combined with three days/week of distance learning OR
 - Full time virtual instruction by request
 - Families who do not respond will default to participate in the hybrid model.
- APS will strive to meet the requirements in each IEP to every extent that is possible
 - Both in person and virtual direct services will be provided to meet IEP hours
- OSE will give guidance to schools to meet in the fall as needed to make adjustments to IEPs for additional accommodations and services to support distance learning
 - Related Services will be provided both by tele-therapy and in person
 - Case Carriers will be ready to support executive functioning needs virtually through a variety of strategies including more frequent check-ins

“It will not be the way that it was this spring”

AGENDA ITEM – Discussion with OSE

7:42pm

Responses to previous comments:

Heather R said they appreciate hearing about distance learning concerns and challenges. More direct instruction and more time appreciated.

Virtual PE Course: Health and PE 1 and 2 are required. APS is reluctant to approve requests for virtual classes.

Kelly K discussed Fleet Preschool Classroom: Pre-K and deaf/hard hearing will work to ensure that necessary services are provided.

AGENDA ITEM – Committee Business

Voting on Minutes for February & May

19 Yes votes--All except absence from Paul Tim and an abstenion

Welcomed three new committee members

For 20-21 school year, will determine if there's a better Tuesday to hold meetings when the School Board member can attend meetings

Policy Update

Katy Pericak (Policy Chair)

Policy Review Committee - Reviews policies as they come-up and are available for review. Anybody can join this committee. No need to be a member of ASEAC.

1. School start times: Submitting comments tomorrow through Engage page.
2. School health policy: Will provide additional comments (will send by July 12th)

Transportation Update:

Nick: Will revisit policies in the fall.

Will revisit the Program Evaluation in the fall

New Leadership Team - Welcome

Duran: Commits to coming to ASEAC meetings in the future.

Meeting
Adjourned

Meeting Adjourned at 8:15pm