

**Fairfax County Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD)  
Meeting Minutes  
October 7, 2019**

Member Name		Organization	Attendance
Darcy	Acquavella	City of Fairfax School Board	P
Laura	Allen	Region 5	E
Joe	Alston	Member at Large (Moon)	E
Ally	Baldassari	SEPTA	P
Michael	Beattie	Disability Services Board	P
Cheri	Belkowitz *	Springfield District	P
Liz	Brocato	Braddock District	P
Brandon	Cassady	Hunter Mill District	P
Sandi	Dallhoff ***	Department of Neighborhood & Community Services	E
Susan	Edgerton	POAC - NOVA	P
Judy	Farabaugh	Member at Large (McElveen)	E
Mary Kate	Ganley	Student Representative	E
Meghan	Gray	Lee District	E
Mary	Hackman	Providence District	E
Harry	Henderson	Mason District	E
Lissy	John	Dranesville District	P
Lynn	Kiewel	Fairfax County Health Department	P
Toby	Latham	Assistive Technology Services	P
Erin	Lauer	Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board	P
Connie	Lorentzen **	Mount Vernon District	E
Linda	Mason	Higher Education	E
Phara	Rodrigue	Member at Large (Keys-Gamarra)	P
Michael	Simon	Sully District	P
Joanne	Walton	Faculty Representative	P
Ann-Marie	Ward ***	Fairfax County Council of PTAs	P
Cathy	White	Transition Services	
Jessica	White	Preschool	
Niki	Zimmerman	Region 2	E
Vacant		Region 1	
Vacant		Region 3	
Vacant		Region 4	
Vacant		Federation of Citizens	
Vacant		League of Women Voters	
* Chair **Vice-Chair *** Secretary P = Present E = Excused Absence R = Resigned			

**FCPS Staff Who Were Present:**

- Jane Strong - Director, Office of Special Education Procedural Support
- Dawn Clements – Assistant Ombudsman for Special Education

**School Board Liaison Present:** Elizabeth Schultz, Springfield District

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**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:04 p.m. by Cheri Belkowitz

**Agenda & Minutes:**

- The approval of the September minutes was postponed until the November meeting.
- Cheri Belkowitz introduced the agenda for the meeting. Joanne Walton moved to approve the agenda as presented. Susan Edgerton seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

**Public Comment**

- There was no one who wished to give public comment.

**Parent Resource Center News:**

- Mary Beth Harrison-Cunningham, Director of the PRC, could not attend but sent an update via email which included a PDF of all workshops for the year. Information and registration for workshops can be found at the PRC website: <https://www.fcps.edu/resources/family-engagement/parent-resource-center/workshops-parents-educators-and-community>  
Some of the workshops will be recorded and available on the PRC YouTube channel.
- Cheri Belkowitz highlighted that the Future Quest College and Career Conference at George Mason is on Saturday, October 26. This event is only held every other year. Registration is required.

**Presentation by Special Education Ombudsman, Dawn Clements:**

- The FCPS Ombudsman's Office consists of Ombudsman Armando Peri, Ombudsman for Special Education Dawn Clements, and an administrative assistant
- All contacts with the ombudsman's office are
  - Confidential (except in cases of child safety or financial fraud)
  - Independent (ombudsmen report to Chief Equity Officer, Dr. Francisco Duran)
  - Informal
  - Impartial
- Ms. Clements began work on August 1. She is a former special education teacher and FCPS procedural support liaison (PSL).
- Her role is to serve as a resource for parents for issues surrounding special education, including special education law and IEP procedures.
- To contact the ombudsman, members of the community may call, email, or visit the website. In the initial consult, information will be gathered and can be reported anonymously. The

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ombudsman will ask any relevant questions and determine desired outcomes. The ombudsman will help to brainstorm solutions and may seek permission to share with FCPS staff as appropriate. The ombudsman may continue to provide support, follow up, contact schools/offices, and provide informal mediation, if requested.

- The ombudsman's office will share quarterly updates to the superintendent and school board, as well as present an annual report. All data and trends are compiled and analyzed without identifying information. Reporting will include method of contact (email, phone call), general topic, grade level (elementary/middle/high), and FCPS region.
- Common special education themes from last year's annual report:
  - The IEP Process can be overwhelming, intimidating, and adversarial. Parents felt their input was not considered and needed a guide to the process. Many had to hire advocates to be heard. There is a sense that staff members are afraid to contradict central office and school administration.
  - Parents reported that schools had a lack of social skills training, lack of access to advanced courses for 2e students, inconsistent application of resources, and placement of students with autism and emotional disabilities in the same setting.
  - The use of restraint and seclusion was mentioned by parents, teachers, and community members. Concerns were shared about policy changes, training for staff, notification & documentation, and a need for better communication.
- Responses by FCPS and School Board related to last year's concerns:
  - Discipline Study
  - Revision of Student Rights and Responsibilities
  - Updated professional development for administrators
  - Handbook for Twice Exceptional (2e) students
  - Dyslexia Open House and handbook
  - Special Education Task Force for Restraint and Seclusion
  - Addition of Assistant Ombudsman
- The ombudsman's office will continue outreach to PTAs, FCCPTA, POAC, SEPTA, conferences, community groups, places of worship, HOAs, as well as to school principals, parent liaisons, and FCPS offices.
- Brochures about the ombudsman's office are available in 9 languages.
- Questions:
  - Can staff/FCPS employees come to the office with their own concerns and expect confidentiality? Yes, as of October 1, staff can use the ombudsman's office.
  - Can contact information be posted in each school? This will be looked into.
  - How can the ACSD collaborate on figuring out what the unmet needs are? Assistant Ombudsman plans to attend our monthly meetings.
  - Website needs to be updated: <https://www.fcps.edu/department/office-family-student-ombudsman> - that is in progress
  - Should ombudsman participate in the IEP? Discussions ongoing
  - How many questions/calls? 3 per day on average for special education needs

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**Special Education Update:**

- Teresa Johnson and Mike Bloom could not attend. Jane Strong brought copies of Who to Call list for the Office of Procedural Support.
- Cheri presented about the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual FCPS Health and Wellness Conference. The keynote was by Mark Brackett, author of Permission to Feel. He spoke about emotional intelligence and using the RULER approach to teach students how to identify and manage their emotions: Recognizing Understanding Labeling Expressing Regulating. At least 30 FCPS schools have been trained in this approach. The ACSD may consider sending a letter to the school board to encourage the adoption of this approach in all schools.
- ACSD has been asking for an FCPS email address to accept questions and comments. There has been some push-back from the FCPS counsel. Cheri Belkowitz is considering next steps, including submitting a complaint to the VDOE.
- Cheri Belkowitz created the ACSD Facebook page and will be adding other administrators. The Family Engagement & Outreach subcommittee will develop a social media policy and start a Twitter account. Flyers have been created for the Meet & Greet on October 22. We will need a plan and a quick turnaround to disseminate the flyers to schools and community groups.

**Subcommittee Work Sessions / Reports:**

- **Family Engagement & Outreach**

**Chair: Ann-Marie Ward**

**Members: Darcy Acquavella, Joe Alston, Liz Brocato, Mary Hackman, Lissy John, Mike Simon, Joanne Walton**

The sub-committee plans to follow up on last year's suggested actions including:

- Social media presence (Facebook, Twitter) and a social media policy
- Paper and online surveys
- Dissemination of information via school pyramids

- **Policy and Regulation**

**Co-Chairs: Ally Baldassari & Brandon Cassady**

**Members: Michael Beattie, Mary Hackman, Toby Latham**

The sub-committee plans to focus on the following topics this year

- Unwritten policies
- Equity and consistency in service delivery
- Accountability for school policies, regulations, and guidelines
- Access for all: academic levels, electives, extracurriculars

- **Student Achievement & Outcomes**

**Chair: TBD**

**Members: Laura Allen, Meghan Gray, Erin Lauer, Cathy White, Niki Zimmerman**

Erin Lauer was the only sub-committee member in attendance so sub-committee chair and focus will be forthcoming

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- **School Board Charge**

**Chair: Susan Edgerton**

**Members: Brandon Cassady, Sandi Dallhoff, Mary Kate Ganley, Phara Rodrigue, Joanne Walton**

“Examine current FCPS practices regarding the communication and dissemination of information to parents related to supports and services provided to students with disabilities. Make recommendations designed to improve and strengthen the relationship between parents of students with disabilities and FCPS school staff and central office staff.”

- FCPS is so large and complex, people who are being left behind – language, cultural, lack of technology access
- Communication between parents and teachers – don’t get enough feedback from special education students
- Technology barriers – Google Classroom, how to get information

**New Business / Announcements:**

- There was a brief discussion about the I’m Determined program. There were plans to hold an I’m Determined mini-summit in Fairfax, but there was a change in leadership and the mini-summit does not appear to be planned. There was also a student strand at the Special Education Conference last year but there is some confusion as to whether that will be happening this year. Cheri Belkowitz will follow up with staff.
- Nov 13-15: Conference on ADA in Philadelphia
- Oct 12, 10 am: SpEdUp training – hosted by the ASNV at Service Source, Oakton
- Is FCPS planning anything for National Mentoring Day? FCPS staff is not aware of anything.
- Oct 22: The documentary Intelligent Lives will be aired on TV but might not be available in our area. Toby Latham has the rights to show it. Perhaps the ACSD could show it – SEACs are permitted to have educational programming.

**Meeting adjourned:** Cheri Belkowitz adjourned the meeting at 9:13 p.m.