

**Fairfax County Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD)
Meeting Minutes
February 10, 2021**

Member Name		Organization	Attendance
Darcy	Acquavella	City of Fairfax School Board	P
Ally	Baldassari ***	SEPTA	P
Sanaa	Bouzit	Member at Large-Abrar Omeish	P
Liz	Brocato	Braddock District-Megan McLaughlin	P
Brandon	Cassady	Hunter Mill District-Melanie Meren	P
Sandi	Dalhoff	Neighborhood & Community Services	P
Susan	Edgerton	Member at Large-Rachna Sizemore-Heizer	P
Mary Kate	Ganley	Student Representative	P
James	Gillespie	Fairfax/Falls Church Community Services Board	P
Meghan	Gray	Lee District-Tamara Derenak Kaufa	P
Mary	Hackman	Providence District-Karl Frisch	P
Harry	Henderson	Mason District-Ricardy Anderson	P
Lissy	John	Dranesville District-Elaine Tholen	P
Lynn	Kiewel	Fairfax Co. Health Dept.	E
Andrienne	Konstas	League of Women Voters	P
Toby	Latham	Springfield District-Laura Jane Cohen	P
Connie	Lorentzen *	Mount Vernon District-Karen Corbett Sanders	P
Rachel	Macias	Region 4- -Jay Pearson-Assistant Superintendent	P
Linda	Mason	Higher Education	E
Phara	Rodrigue	Member at Large-Karen Keys Gamarra	P
Brianne	Russell-Morris	POAC-NoVA	P
Michael	Simon	Sully District-Stella Pekarsky	P
Dena	Sonneborn	Region 3-Nardos King-Assistant Superintendent	P
Joanne	Walton**	Faculty	P
Ann-Marie	Ward ***	Fairfax County Council PTA	P
Niki	Zimmerman	Region 2-Fabio Zuluaga-Assistant Superintendent	P
* Chair **Vice-Chair *** Secretary			P = Present E = Excused Absence R = Resigned

FCPS Staff Who Were Present:

- Michelle Boyd, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Special Services
- Lisa Williams, Chief Equity Officer
- Mike Bloom, Director of Special Education Instruction
- Dawn Clements, Assistant Ombudsman for Special Education
- Mary Beth Harrison-Cunningham, Director of Parent Resource Center
- Deb Scott, Director of Intervention and Prevention Services

School Board Members Present:

- Rachna Sizemore Heizer, At-Large, Committee Liaison

This meeting was held virtually via Blackboard Collaborate Ultra and live-streamed on the FCPS website. The meeting was recorded. Public comment was submitted electronically.

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Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. by Connie Lorentzen.

Agenda & Minutes:

- Ann-Marie presented the minutes from the January 2021 meeting. Joanne motioned to approve the minutes as presented. Dena seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- Ann-Marie introduced the agenda for the meeting. Joanne motioned to accept the agenda as presented. Ally seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment:

- Video testimony from Lauren McCaughey about disparities from school to school in Fairfax County. Central office staff create programs, resources, and materials that are not evenly used. She recommends that staff attend meetings at local schools every week to see the reality.
- Written testimony from Christina Hunt who has a son with school anxiety and school refusal. The virtual environment has been a success and she would like to see this option offered for students post-pandemic. Full written testimony is appended to the minutes.

Attendance Report:

- There are 26 appointed members who serve on the ACSD. A quorum is established with 14 members present. There were 24 members present at tonight's meeting. FCPS staff in attendance included Mike Bloom, Director of Special Education Instruction, Mary Beth Harrison-Cunningham, Director of the Parent Resource Center, Dawn Clements, Assistant Ombudsman for Special Education, Dr. Lisa Williams, Chief Equity Officer, and Dr. Michelle Boyd, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Special Services. The school board liaison to the ACSD, Rachna Sizemore Heizer, was also present.

Chief Equity Officer

- Committee members introduced themselves to the new Chief Equity Officer, Dr. Lisa Williams. Dr. Williams briefly spoke about how her equity work intersects with meeting the academic, social Emotional and functional needs of students with disabilities and the functions of the Committee.

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Parent Resource Center News

- Mary Beth Harrison-Cunningham, Director of the Parent Resource Center, shared an update.

PRC staff will be returning to the Dunn Loring Center the week of March 16, but by appointment only. The library will have an additional pick-up day at Dunn Loring. In person consultations will resume by appointment only. Webinars will continue virtually. Having an Arabic language webinar for parents in March. Another Spanish language webinar is slated for the beginning of April. Still working on the purchase of e-books.

Upcoming Webinars include:

- Fri Feb 12 – Managing the Moments: Strategies for Families to Create Calm and Confidence in the Midst of Chaos and Uncertainty
- Wed Feb 17 – Strategies to Support SEL at Home
- Thu Feb 18 – Behavior Intervention Services Series
- Fri Feb 19 – Strategies to Support SEL at Home
- Fri Feb 26 – Is it Over Yet? How to Help your Child Cope with the Pandemic and the Eventual Return to Normalcy
- Mar 19 – Special Education Process with PSL

The community can see past webinars on the PRC YouTube channel.

Presentation: Office of the Ombudsman Data Report

- Dawn Clements, Assistant Ombudsman for Special Education, gave a presentation about the Ombudsman's office.
- An ombudsman is a person who listens to and helps to resolve concerns and problems and is confidential, independent, informal, and impartial. Examples of their work include identifying staff contacts for a particular issue, explaining special education processes and timelines, and facilitating conversations. Non-examples include making or reversing decisions, policies, or regulations; participating in legal or administrative proceedings; or conducting formal investigations.
- The assistant ombudsman serves as a resource, providing information and support to parents and students regarding special education rights and services. She facilitates clarity of state and federal laws and regulations governing special education and offers information related to the parental role as a member of the IEP team. She helps brainstorm informal options or strategies to address concerns and provides transparency and understanding for parents and students.
- The office also shares data/trends to the Chief Equity Officer with quarterly updates for the superintendent and school board. Annual report to school board with compilation and analysis of data/trends. No identifying info, just number of contacts, topics, ES/MS/HS, regions.
- Initial Intake: call 571-423-4014, email ombudsman@fcps.edu or use FCPS portal. Can work with Language Services if necessary.

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- Initial consult for gathering information, clarifying questions, desired outcomes, brainstorm possible solutions, request permission to share with relevant persons when appropriate.
- Support parents as they advocate for their children, schedule follow up, reach out to schools and offices, informal mediation.

Special Education Update:

- Mike Bloom gave an update.
- Dr. Ross Greene will be collaborating with FCPS and they are in the process of scheduling a date (tentatively March) for him to speak to principals/administrators and also to staff. After these meetings, they will be putting together the next steps.
- Return to School Update: 5 Key Mitigation Measures – masks, social distancing, hand hygiene, cleaning and disinfection, contact tracing; Classes may transition to virtual instruction in certain cases; In-person instruction decisions will be based on community transmission, outbreaks, and staff capacity; division level decisions; individual school factors may impact in-person instruction; Priority groups 1-6 will remain in-person unless both school factors and community transmission are at the highest levels. Review of phase-in schedule. Student support plans for student academic and social emotional needs – schools must implement in-person interventions.
- Planning for extended school year is ongoing – in-person and virtual options (13 ES, 3 secondary). There are other (non-special education) summer programs being planned.
- School quality profiles – link on VDOE website to see any school in the state.
- Special Education Conference – Saturday, April 17 – all virtual – some synchronous, some asynchronous – registration coming in March.
- Special Education handbook – should be published online in the next few days – translated versions will be available.

Old Business:

- Connie presented the ACSD FY 2019-20 Annual Report to the school board on January 19, 2021.
- Survey from School Board Public Engagement Committee – please complete.
- Dr. Brabrand responded to our request to provide direct enhanced communications from the central office to special education teachers and pledged to work on the issue.

Chair Update & New Business:

- Connie shared that the First Class Awards nomination form has been revised and she will be working with the Special Education Conference committee to publicize the nominations process.
- SEPTA received an award from National PTA for their advocacy on restraint and seclusion.

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Subcommittee Updates:

- Subcommittee reports are due at the March meeting and subcommittee chairs will give an overview of their report. At the April meeting, the entire committee will review the report in its entirety to make any necessary revisions and approve it to go forward to the superintendent and board.
- Mary mentioned that the Student Achievement and Outcomes subcommittee has put together an informal survey for parents and would like to publish it online.

Member Time:

- SEPTA presentation on Recovery Services, featuring Hank Millward – next Tuesday, February 16
- NOVA District PTA and FCCPTA are presenting a webinar: What to Expect When Schools Transition Back to the Building – Monday, February 22

Next meeting is March 10.
5 pm – 7 pm for Subcommittees,
7 pm – 9 pm for the whole Committee.

Meeting adjourned: Connie adjourned the meeting at 8:58 p.m.

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Public Comment:

My name is Christina Hunt and I am a mother to four school age children in this district. My high school age son has struggled with severe anxiety and school refusal for the past six years. He did not feel safe at school and also struggled with elopement during the school day. When he was in sixth grade he struggled so much with his anxiety that the school said he could not come back the next year. Burke School was recommended as a temporary solution to help with emotional regulation. Going to Burke made things worse in every way. Attending school with students who are acting out in loud, aggressive and violent ways served to increase his anxiety. The school did not understand my son, and while we had great interactions with some staff members, it was a hellish experience. We worked to transition my son to Twain during his 8th grade year because he had wanted to attend his base high school and experience more scholastically rigorous classes. We slowly transitioned him through the year and things were going well. It was a lot of work to deal with two different schools and take the bus from Burke to Twain, but he was doing well in his classes and felt successful.

PE had always been a big struggle for my son, so we left that class to the end. I advocated in every way I knew for alternatives (including a letter from our psychiatrist that encouraged a different plan for PE). The IEP team stated that there were no alternatives to PE. So, when my son, with his severe anxiety and sensory issues attended class on the first day of third quarter with over 100 kids, he ended up shut down on the floor. The school called me to pick him up, and he refused to go back to school for the rest of the year. As soon as it was demonstrated that he could not actually do the class, the team presented an option where he would work on health related worksheets independently during his PE hour. Why did they have to wait for him to fail first? My son was made to feel like a failure, and his depression was so severe, for the remainder of that school year and through the next summer that he would not get out of bed or leave the house. He frequently talked about how he would rather be dead.

My son is a senior this year. He completed three years at Quander, which was a horrible fit for him as well. If there is no academic challenge for a student that would thrive with one, it will lead to poor outcomes. There are also vast inequities in the programs available for kids at the public day schools. There are no foreign languages and there is no option for an advanced diploma. The school says that foreign language is an available option, if the student can walk to nearby West Potomac, and navigate the building independently to take said foreign language course. If walking to the nearby school and navigating it independently were an option for students like my son, they would already be attending their base schools. This is a “solution” that is not designed for the success of the intended students.

My son was able to take a of course at Lewis High School last year by coming in and leaving early, in order to avoid the crowded hallways. This year he was able to transition to Lewis full-time, as well as take a couple of courses at Edison Academy. The team agreed to this because of the virtual environment. I know that many students are struggling this year, but my son has been successful in the virtual learning environment. He is engaged in and attending all of his classes, and is set to graduate this spring. I wanted to share our experience so that the school district will appreciate the importance of exploring alternative learning environments for 2E learners. One benefit of the pandemic is that we now know that the traditional educational model is not the

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only way for students to be successful. In fact, the traditional model can actually be a hindrance for some students.

I have had countless IEP meetings where I have been told how unique my son, but that isn't actually the case. There are many students who are struggling with severe anxiety and school refusal. We need to work together to understand the needs of this population, and we need to be creative in offering academics and social supports for these students. Placing these students in public day school simply because we don't understand their disability does a disservice to the students, their families, the schools and our community.