

**Fairfax County Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD)
Meeting Minutes
October 14, 2020**

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	
James	Gillespie	Fairfax/Falls Church Community Services Board	P
Meghan	Gray	Lee District-Tamara Derenak Kaufax	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.	P
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	P
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	
* Chair **Vice-Chair *** Secretary			P = Present E = Excused Absence R = Resigned

FCPS Staff Who Were Present:

- Michelle Boyd, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Special Services
- Mike Bloom, Director of Special Education Instruction
- Jane Strong, Director of the Office of Procedural Support
- Mary Beth Harrison-Cunningham, Director of the Parent Resource Center
- Dawn Clements, Assistant Ombudsman for Special Education
- Jugnu Agrawal, Manager of Special Education Curriculum
- Carrie Leetsma, Education Specialist for Dyslexia

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 7:05 p.m.

The committee welcomed new Assistant Superintendent Michelle Boyd and introduced themselves.

Agenda & Minutes:

- Ann-Marie presented the minutes from the September meeting. Ally motioned to approve the minutes. Joanne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
- Ann-Marie introduced the agenda for the meeting. Ally motioned to amend the agenda to include previously distributed motions to the New Business portion of the meeting. Joanne seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment:

- Written testimony from Norm Hall regarding SRS.
- Audio testimony in Spanish from Jose Miguel Villafuerte Lupa. A translation will be available prior to the next meeting and will be read into the record at the next meeting.
- Written testimony from Rebecca Leach about her child's early experience in school with reading/writing and difficulty getting him evaluated.
- Video testimony from Amanda Campbell, member of SEPTA about AAC and literacy, and the need for phonological awareness vs whole language instruction. Concerns about Return to School – concerns from teachers about PPE, especially hands-on/toileting assistance.
- Written testimony from Shannon Duncan, Decoding Dyslexia Virginia.
- Video testimony from Diane Cooper-Gould, member of SEPTA about the working relationship between SEPTA and FCPS. Concerns about Literacy and dyslexia and the implementation of the science of reading: 5 pillars need to be taught to all students, not just students with dyslexia and who are struggling with reading

NOTE: Written testimony can be found in its entirety at the end of the minutes.

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Parent Resource Center News:

- **Mary Beth Harrison-Cunningham**, Director of the PRC, provided an update on upcoming webinars. There are still spaces for the remaining October webinars, as well as the upcoming November webinars. The PRC YouTube channel contains many recordings of previous workshops and webinars. Library materials are available for check-out, please call or email for details.

Presentation: Literacy Instruction, Intervention & Supports for Students with Disabilities

- Presentation by Carrie Leetsma, Dyslexia Specialist, who works both with the department of special services and with the department of elementary instruction / language arts to ensure that best practices are being used for all students.
- Review of FCPS data / reading SOLs scores for students with disabilities
- Specialized reading programs and literacy matrix – link to the new reading matrix:
<https://www.fcps.edu/sites/default/files/media/forms/HI-readingmatrix.pdf>
 - What's the Same: break down by domain, links to publisher's webpage, provide large overview of program
 - What's Different: Removed the dyslexia asterisk for specific programs, removed tiers to align with FCPS-MTSS, updated based on guidance from publisher
- Dyslexia supports and approach to intervention
 - I-ready set back to screen in all domain areas
 - Literacy notification law (2020)
 - Ongoing training to literacy leaders (reading teachers & coaches) in all schools (guidance on intervention)
 - Expanding matrix to include Orton Gillingham – will be adding more training for teachers
 - All computers have accessibility (text to speech, speech to text)
 - Teachers as trainers for LETRS program (science of reading)
 - OSEI has new curriculum resource teachers who can assess that students are in the correct program
- Question about reading instruction for students using AAC, the FCPS staff did not know and will find out
- Parents report ESY students don't always get correct reading program, FCPS will look into that because it shouldn't be the case
- Are reading programs always administered by trained staff? Yes, they should be and if they are not trained appropriately, the school principal should be notified.
- Arlington approach for Orton-Gillingham, how is it different?
- Time recommendations? They are not on the matrix but on the publisher's website, IEP team will clarify the amount of time. There may be issues with fidelity of implementation if parents/teams don't know the recommendations.
- 6 curriculum specialists supporting adapted curriculum, organized by region, is that enough? Students in adapted curriculum is 1% of IEP students. They could always use more staff.
- Dyslexia Open House – October 28
- Questions, contact csleestma@fcps.edu

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Special Education Update:

- **Mike Bloom** shared some updates about the return to school phase-in for in-person cohorts. More information about the return to school will be available at the school board work session on October 15. Questions about the phase-in should be addressed to case manager and principal.
- **Michelle Boyd** mentioned that more details will be provided at the school board work session, particularly about specific groups and when they will return. They are trying to work out details with students who have both gen ed and special ed time. As we transition to some in-person instruction, schools will communicate in the unlikely event of teacher changes / schedule changes. She welcomes questions about their presentation after the school board meeting.

Chair Update / New Business:

- October 20 – Policy & Regulation subcommittee meeting with Jane Strong
- Executive Committee provided input on the final revisions for the FCPS Special Education Handbook
- New committee members should consult the ACSD binder (provided via flash drive) – questions should be directed to the chair or secretaries
- Subcommittee chairs should contact the chair if they wish to have a presenter / specific meeting topic

- **Motions:**

Ally brought forward the following motions:

1. *I move*, The ACSD shall request the staff liaison to take all necessary steps to add a representative member from the DDVA, Decoding Dyslexia Virginia, to the ACSD.

Darcy seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

2. *I move*, The Chair shall make a recommendation to the Superintendent on behalf of the ACSD. The chair shall recommend that the Department of Special Services is enabled to email all special education staff directly (teachers, support staff, related services) to promote increased communication and flow of information directly to all special education staff.

Joanne seconded.

Justification: Whereas, at the 9/9/2020 meeting, Mike Bloom responded that there was currently no way for FCPS central office to email all special education staff for

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purposes of direct communication of new resources. This would include the 2e and other handbooks, and the "Virtual Orientation Considerations for Students with Disabilities" document he referenced at the last meeting.

The motion passed with one absention.

3. *I move*, The Chair, on behalf of the ACSD, will advise the School Board and Superintendent of the need to ensure students with disabilities, the most underrepresented group at TJHSST, be included in all efforts to increase diversity, representation, and inclusion at TJHSST. Further, the ACSD should be officially included in all ongoing district efforts to increase equity and diversity both at TJHSST and the AAP pipeline.

Joanne seconded.

The motion passed unanimously.

Member Time:

- Due to the late hour, please send announcements to Ally.

Subcommittee Update:

- Subcommittee chairs should email their name and subcommittee focus to Ally.

Next meeting is November 11. 5 pm – 7 pm for Subcommittees, 7 pm – 9 pm for the whole Committee.

Meeting adjourned: Connie adjourned the meeting at 9:18 p.m.

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Public Comment from Norm Hall, submitted retroactively from September 2020

Tonight, I am concerned about the elementary-aged students who have identified (or possible conditions) which may affect their learning, and are accessing their education via the Supporting Return to School program run by the Fairfax County Department of Neighborhood and Community Services, Office for Children. Formerly, the staff working with children were working, as I have, as Day Care Center Teachers and others in the School Aged After Care program.

These would be children who have 504 plans, IEPs, or are eligible for evaluation meetings that would typically be provided in the school setting.

I want to start by commending the FCPS Department of Special Services for offering excellent training for our staff two weeks ago. This was before SACC staff knew which location they would be assigned to, and so did not know even the names of the children for whom they would be responsible.

The registration process for this program did not collection information about the special education status of children, nor even the name of the teacher at the students' base schools. Any information about accommodations for distance learning needed to come from ad hoc communications between SRS staff and parents.

The SRS program is based on a number of classrooms where up to ten children would be assigned to dedicated staff in a "bubble" known to everyone by a color. Each bubble has no more than 3 staff who are expected to work only with this set of children each day of the SRS program.

It has been established that no other persons are allowed in these rooms, as a COVID-19 epidemic precaution. I think this is reasonable, especially for child care functions that our jobs ordinarily occur.

What is problematic is that SRS/SACC staff are not expected or able to provide extra attention or care to any child who may need more for reasons that relate to that special learning issues. In other words, while our training made references to making sure children understood oral instruction and being prepared to develop/share behavior charts, as appropriate, the placement of ten children exceeds the standards of many special education classrooms. Each child has their own device and headset while logged in during times when only one staff may be at liberty to work with them all. There may be no possibility for one-on-one work under these circumstances. Further, there is no provision for staff to have access to documentation in the form of 504 Plans, IEPs or workups for educational evaluations.

Because there is no way for SRS/SACC staff to know how many students may need specific accommodations for the children to engage in meaningful learning, I would like to ask for everybody's help tonight to make sure that SRS/SACC staff, classroom teachers, and parents of students with disabilities are able to access a common platform to share concerns and expectations so that all children, by name and by need, can succeed.

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Ideally, this would have taken place before the program started. But given the importance of jobs and benefits for staff, education for students, and support for classroom teachers, sooner would be better than later.

Public Comment from Rebecca Leach

Thank you for accepting my written testimony and being open to hearing the stories, successes, questions and concerns of so many parents across FCPS. Many times I have considered testifying, but have not felt that my son's story is compelling enough for this forum. When I saw that dyslexia is a topic this week, I felt the timing was right.

Learning disabilities were not on my mind when I had my three kids as there is no known family history. My oldest son (now in 5th grade), was recognized by his daycare providers and others as smart from a very early age. All parents consider their children smart, but we recognized his ability to pick things up quickly and learn and retain lots of information about topics that interested him (such as dinosaurs). However, he was unable to remember some very basic things (such as his address) and had troubles remembering his letters. In pre-k, we hired his teacher to tutor him a few hours a week on his letters because as parents we thought he just wasn't getting it and felt he was behind his peers. We were secretly relieved that he missed the age cutoff for Kindergarten by a few days, and would enter school at almost 6 years old, given what we now understand as his asynchronous development.

In Kindergarten we sensed he was behind his peers, but according to his teacher he was 'fine', just on the low end of average. He is our first born, and we had nothing to compare him too, so we second-guessed ourselves and relied on his teachers to help us make sense of his progress. At the end of the year I asked his teacher if we should consider a tutor over the summer and was assured again that he was fine – 'some kids are just slow readers'. Despite this assurance, I felt concern about his ability to read – or lack thereof. In first grade he was placed in the lowest reading group, but around the winter holidays, he suddenly seemed to pick it up and started reading voraciously. Issue resolved.

Unfortunately, that wasn't the end – his reading was now on target, but he struggled to write. In the spring, we held a meeting with his teacher because of our shared concerns. We were told that he was smart, but 'lazy' – he just needed to 'try harder.' We pushed him harder – and while it felt to us that he was trying, we didn't see the product for the effort. Summer came as a great relief.

In our second-grade parent teacher conference, we were told that he was smart, but wasn't trying very hard (we internalized this as code for 'lazy'). We pushed him harder. I felt embarrassed at a curriculum night when I saw his work displayed on the wall - compared to other kids his handwriting was terrible, and the words he had written were incomprehensible – and questioned how our smart child was doing so poorly. In the meantime, we were getting into nightly fights over homework. I didn't understand the refusal to do the work and the anger. Finally, out of sheer desperation, I reached out to the counselor at our elementary school asking for help in easing the nightly fights. She, in a response that I am forever grateful for, suggested we do a child study. I had no idea what that was but honestly, didn't care at that point – I was willing to

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do anything to help figure out why my smart kid was so ‘lazy’ and why writing seemed to be such a battle. Around the same time we hired a FCPS teacher (who is now a reading specialist at a high school) to tutor him. She reiterated to us that he was ‘lazy’ and did not demonstrate a growth mindset.

At the end of his second-grade year, we got the child study results. I wasn’t surprised to hear that he was in the 99.5th percentile for intelligence. What was surprising was that he was identified as 2e (what was that?!?!) gifted but also has dyslexia, anxiety, and executive function issues. These were all new diagnoses to me that I knew very little about. That night I began my research and eventually joined SEPTA and learned how I could best advocate for him. When he started third grade my husband and I met with his teacher before school started (he was in a Level IV class) so that we could get him started on the right track and help her understand him and his IEP.

Since then, things have improved with him, but as a 2e learner he still struggles with asynchronous development and in particular with writing and spelling. We are very grateful for some of the amazing staff at his school that were pivotal in helping him reset (the counselor, his third grade teacher, his first special ed teacher). Unfortunately, there have also been some bumps along the way – IEP support not being provided as agreed to, virtual learning did not work for him (his slower processing speed made it hard for him to participate leaving him frustrated, and he struggles with typing, despite us purchasing different typing programs for people with dyslexia). We have had to adjust how we parent to better meet his needs – it’s been a learning process for all of us.

Despite the positive outcome, I spend a lot of time thinking about how he was missed when the signs were so clear. The message we received as parents was that we were not pushing him and he wasn’t trying. I understand that because he is gifted he can mask his disabilities, but having seen his school it is clear that he was struggling. If I wasn’t a pushy parent who trusted the amazing school counselor, I know that I would still be having meetings where I’m told he is lazy and not living up to his potential. The sad part is that having read books and literature on dyslexia and his other challenges – the signs were all from an early age. I know that I am part of this, but I expect more from our educators. Calling a child lazy is the easy way out – and all evidence I can find shows that children are engaged and motivated learners, but when their specific learning needs are not met, they stop trying out of fear or frustration –which is often perceived as lazy.

How many more are missed because they are perceived as not trying? Maybe they don’t have parents that push or recognize the signs of a learning disability? We are failing our children. Reading and writing are two skills that are crucial for a child’s development – we can’t let our children flounder because our teachers are overworked or have too many kids in their classroom to pick up on the clues that are evident. We need to arm our educators with the tools necessary to be able to push-in and question when there are questions or concerns. “Laziness” is not the correct answer – and it is our responsibility as parents, as a school board, as ASCD, as those invested in our youth, to make sure we never accept that answer, but that we use science and research and all the tools available to do the best for each and every child – especially those most at risk of falling through the cracks.

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Additionally, there is still much work to be done as FCPS does not support Orton-Gillingham as the approach for dyslexic learners – rather choosing programs such as Foundations or Just Words. We need to trust science and support these learners with the only proven approach that works. Once identifying students with a particular need, why aren't we meeting those needs? I hear “By name and by need” often, but that doesn't seem to extend to those with dyslexia if it's not within the programs already available. I've asked for this at IEP meetings and am met with the response that, these programs work just as well and are what FCPS uses- we will not consider Orton-Gillingham. Our focus should be on evidence-based interventions. For these children, we need to go beyond just providing interventions –we need to train teachers and educators how to use them appropriately and administer them with fidelity. Dyslexia impacts enough people in the county based on nationwide statistics, that there is clear justification for more training and support. I hope that this group continues to advocate for different approaches.

I appreciate the work that you are doing and that you have taken the time to hear my story. I hope that we can all be a part of making a brighter future for all children.

Public Comment from Shannon Duncan

Good evening, my name is Shannon Duncan and I am a founding member of Decoding Dyslexia Virginia. We welcome our new Assistant Superintendent of Special Services, Dr. Michelle Boyd, and look forward to many years of collaboration in support of students with dyslexia within the school district.

Decoding Dyslexia Virginia is a grassroots movement focused on linking families to resources, support, and educational interventions for dyslexia. We aim to raise dyslexia awareness, empower families to support their children and inform policy-makers on best practices to identify, remediate and support students with dyslexia in Virginia.

Our group is made up of parents whose children are dyslexic and the professionals that support our community. We are not experts; we are not a business or an educational organization. We offer the community the benefit of our collective experiences. We encourage parents to meet with their local policy-makers to tell the story of their child, and ask for policies and/or legislation to identify and support children with dyslexia in our public schools.

We are advocating for Virginia to implement:

- Teacher/staff training on dyslexia, its warning signs and appropriate intervention strategies
- Early screening tests for dyslexia to include parental notification
- Evidenced-based dyslexia remediation programs implemented with fidelity which can be accessed by both general and special education populations
- Access to appropriate “assistive technologies” in the public school setting for students with dyslexia

Decoding Dyslexia Virginia has worked closely with FCPS Leadership since 2014 to help modify district practice and procedure in order to identify students early; remediate their deficits using evidenced based interventions delivered with fidelity; empower teachers with the foundational skills rooted in the science of reading; and provide access to assistive technology

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for all students with disabilities. While FCPS has made enormous strides forward since 2014... Equity, Fidelity and Accountability are lacking in every aspect of the components of effective reading acquisition throughout the district. We look forward to working together to ensure that all students within the district have the opportunity to learn to read and reach their full potential.