

Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) - Fairfax County Public Schools
Wednesday, November 9, 2022 , 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Summary of Business Conducted:

- The ACSD welcomed the administrators of the Burke School, Quander Road, and Cedar Lane who discussed their special education centers and answered questions.
 - The ACSD approved submitting a response to the Department of Special Services (DSS) on the proposed IEP changes. This response was drafted by the Family Engagement and Community Outreach subcommittee.
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Executive Committee:

Chair, Harry Henderson

Vice Chair, Elizabeth Zielinski

Secretaries, Ally Baldassari (Recording) and Lauren McCaughey (Corresponding)

Member Attendance: A quorum of voting members was confirmed by Recording Secretary Ally Baldassari with 25/29 voting members in attendance. There are 34 positions on the ACSD; five currently vacant. The full record of attendance, members, and vacancies is appended. All attendance is a hybrid of in-person and virtual attendance.

Liaisons/FCPS Guests:

Mike Bloom, Director, Office of Special Education Instruction

Michelle Boyd, Assistant Superintendent, Department of Special Services

Laura Jane Cohen, School Board Liaison

Kathy Murphy, Assistant Ombudsman for Special Education

Mary Beth Harrison-Cunningham, Manager of the Parent Resource Center

Thomas Sweet, Interim Principal, Burke School

Brad Bartosiewicz, Acting Assistant Principal, Burke School

Tom Lunday, Principal, Cedar Lane School

Frank Tranfa, Principal, Quander Road School

Ellen Glaser, Assistant Principal, Quander Road School

Meeting Agenda:

1. Call to Order, Harry Henderson, Chair
2. Approval of Minutes and Adoption of Agenda, Harry Henderson, Chair
3. General Announcements
 - a. We will be considering the recommendations of the Family Engagement and Community Outreach (FECO) subcommittee on IEP changes. If approved, this will be turned over to the Department of Special Services (DSS), and we will ask them to return with their response to our recommendations in December.

- b. Reminder to the public (8 members in attendance) to be respectful and avoid interrupting the meeting.
4. Public Comment - Elizabeth Zielinski, Vice Chair [Four in person, one written testimony read by Ms. Zielinski. All written copies of testimony that were supplied are appended.]
- a. Richard Johnson - Mr. Johnson is a Pre-K autism teacher and has a child in an elementary enhanced autism classroom. He would like to see the names of these classrooms changed to Pre-K ABA classroom and elementary ABA classroom respectively, to avoid labeling the children and instead distinguish what is done differently in these classrooms.
 - b. Sahar Quareshi - Ms. Quareshi is concerned about her child with autism attending a split feeder school. This is especially hard on him, his mental health and social well being because of his challenges making friends. She asks FCPS to please re-evaluate boundaries to prevent split feeder schools.
 - c. Rachel Herndon - Her daughter with down syndrome is in a FCPS preschool program. She is disappointed that FCPS has not offered her daughter an inclusive preschool experience.
 - d. Stephanie Waterhouse - Also spoke on the lack of an inclusive preschool option. They are a military family. She notes that FCPS has failed to meet VA's state standards for inclusion in preschool and high school for the past 5 years.
 - e. Debra Tisler - Is concerned that FCPS is failing to meet LRE standards. She is also concerned that so few recovery services have been awarded to special education families.
5. Attendance Report - Ally Baldassari, Recording Secretary - As above
6. School Board Liaison Update - Laura Jane Cohen, Springfield District
- a. The school board's November 15th work session will be a second round about the Air Final Year report. She and Ms. Omeish are the meeting managers for that meeting. Look for documents which will be posted in advance of the meeting.
 - b. The school board is beginning the process on FCPS's new Strategic Plan. They will be hosting community conversations in which they hear from both families and educators. There will be virtual and hybrid options to ensure multiple ways to participate, and evening vs day opportunities. The draft Strategic Plan will be presented in June.
7. Parent Resource Center (PRC) News - Mary Beth Harrison-Cunningham, Manager of the PRC
- a. PRC hours are M-F, 8AM - 4PM, with the library open for walk-ins and checkouts. 703-204-3941 or the [PRC website](#).

- b. “PRC packs” - Prepackaged materials available around several topics; these include resources for both students and parents (or educators) along with an additional resources sheet.
 - c. November and December webinars: Find info and registration [here](#).
 - d. January 2023 Preview: 1/12/23 Kristen Haynor will present “Neurodiversity: What do you mean we’re all neurodiverse?”; 1/20 “Social Emotional Milestones in Early Childhood is a collaboration with Infant and Toddler Connection; and 1/24/23 The Social Emotional Learning Team will present on the Morning Meeting (elementary school) and Responsive Advisory Meeting (secondary), and what those should look like.
 - e. The PRC will be changing their name to the Family Resource Center to be more inclusive.
8. Presentation: Burke School, Cedar Lane, & Quander Rd. - Thomas Sweet, Interim Principal, and Brad Bartosiewicz, Assistant Principal, Burke School; Tom Lundy, Principal, Cedar Lane School; Frank Tranfa, Principal and Ellen Glaser, Assistant Principal, Quander Road School.
- a. Frank Tranfa has been in FCPS for 23 years with 5 years as principal of Quander Road. He has always worked with students in this population, along a continuum of ED services and autism. Quander and Cedar are general education students working towards a standard diploma. Students fit a profile needing a more restrictive environment, which he considers a more supportive environment. They have increased instructional support with smaller classes, an instruction assistant, and more clinical support. There is a school-wide positive behavior system to support prosocial behaviors. Their goal is that standard diploma, and providing extracurricular activities. Burke School is kinder through 8th grade. He reviewed the FCPS continuum of ED services: services inside the general education setting, then CSS sites, and then the Burke School. They do also have students “coming from the other direction” from more restrictive out-of-county placements, such as hospitalization, private placement. The motto at the Burke School is “Unique and United” and the goal is to get the students to their less restrictive setting.
 - b. The continuum of clinical services : group and individual counseling, crisis intervention, case collaboration and consultation. They are working with community and family providers ensuring collaboration. Trust is the most important thing they can have. Service delivery is very individualized based on individual needs. Cedar Lane and Quander Road divide up the feeder pyramids. They are often an option if a student has a discipline consequence that removes them from their general education school. Students have had one or more failure experiences at their general school or CSS school, and these are all traumatic experiences to be moved out of those schools. They greet each student at the door each day as well as parents who enter the school. That is part of rebuilding trust and rebuilding relationships to help overcome the traumas.
 - c. Supports and Services -They have daily SEL, with morning meetings and themes reinforced throughout the day. They have Positive Behavior Approaches (PBA) which is

where students follow very clear, modeled PBA goals. There are tiers of support. Tier 1 includes PBIS rewards, responsive classroom, and SEL. Tier 2: Student-targeted proactive plans and approaches, brain lab (like an enhanced sensory room but contains self-guided activity that calms and centers them), regular sensory room, check in/checkout sheets, etc. Tier 3: Behavior intervention plans through the IEP.

- d. Collaborative & Proactive Solutions (CPS). 15-20 staff members trained last year.
- e. Ukeru- Universal trauma-based approaches. Help us see how the students see us
- f. Sensory supports -sensory room, brain lab, physical sensory supports like fidgets.
- g. After school participation: Clubs at Quander are built into the advisory period on A day Fridays (which should be every other week). Because the bus rides are long, it's hard to stay after school and then have the long bus ride.
- h. Principal Tranfa from Quander talked about having a "levels" system for behavior management. The students do not carry point sheets, but they are updated on their level. At Quander they also have "Trusted Trio" - the students identify three individuals that he/she feels comfortable talking to.
- i. First round of SOL retakes :Quander Assistant Principal Ellen Glaser talked about an intervention program looking at most critical areas for what they need to pass their SOLs to get their verified credits they require for their standard diploma. They work to fill the gaps before the SOL retake considering there have been significant interruptions to learning from time outside of class, time unavailable for learning when they are emotionally regulating, etc.
- j. Helping students learn strategies that help students access learning - Principal Sweet. Burke school electives include music, art (by music therapist, art therapist respectively) and PE. The goal to get students to a less restrictive setting acknowledges at other schools there are more elective options. They utilize the FCPS central office and Behavior Intervention Services. The Burke School Middle School Afterschool program is robust, so students can seek activities that motivate them. They may build relationships with other students they don't see because they don't move through classes with those students.
- k. The assistant principal says all staff at the schools have dedicated their lives and careers to helping challenging students be successful.

Questions:

Harry Henderson: Staff burnout - how are you addressing this at your schools. A: Principal Sweet says they do not have a large turnover of staff, many have been there for years and the newer staff come from similar settings. Staff are very focused on who they serve and who they want to support. Quander Principal Tranfa agreed he has many who have been there for years.

Randi Consentino: What are the student body sizes and student/staff ratios? Burke is 45 students K-8th with 11-14 active referrals. (They get about 4 referrals a week.) Quander

is around 60 with 14 teachers. 2 come from Central office, 8 IAs Cedar Lane is a little under 80 (they draw from more schools than Quander, so numbers run higher; pre COVID they ran over 100). 20 classroom teachers with 8 instructional assistants. 2 full-time school psychologists, 2 full time social workers, etc. Burke ends the year with more students than they started with, though as they gain students, they do have students that transition back to a less-restrictive settings.

Allison Baldassari: Ms. Baldassari is surprised by the number of referrals. What is the percentage of referrals that result in recommendation of a placement, vs. recommending changes in their current setting to make them successful there? A: There are few instances of students inappropriately referred who have not had a number of placements and interventions prior to referral. Best guess one out of 6 or 7 are inappropriate referrals. Tom Lundy says that of all the referrals they get from base schools or CSS sites, they take less than half of those students. Some are transfer IEPs, meaning students coming from outside the school division, checking in at their base school but will ultimately need another placement. Principal Lundy reminded that us some of the referrals don't come from less restrictive FCPS settings; some might come from private day placements. Mr. Bartosiewicz chimed in that when he views a referral, he thinks what the student needs to be successful - does he have an FBA need a BIP, etc.

Amanda Campbell - Burke School is on a very busy intersection (Burke Lake Rd and Lee Chapel). Are there any modifications needed to keep students safe when they elope? Principal Sweet replied that the physical modifications aren't necessary due to the staff training and response teams in place. They have identified elopers and have systems in place to ensure a barrier between themselves and the road.

[Remaining questions had to be halted due to time constraints. Questions may be submitted through Recording Secretary Baldassari for the Chair to pass to the administrators following the meeting.]

9. Department of Special Services (DSS) Updates - The Ombudsman's Report on the agenda will be deferred to the December meeting due to time.

Lauren McCaughey asked DSS to report on the Ross Greene trainings that have reportedly occurred over the last month. Mr. Bloom reported that Dr. Greene met with all middle, HS, Cedar Lane, Quander Road, and non-traditional school settings administrators for 3 hours with him to learn about the model and have dialogue with Dr. Greene. Also was at Willow Oaks for 2 days, where behavior intervention teachers, Central office staff, PSLs, and administrators of non-traditional programs trained into the model. There will be coaching sessions for all middle and HS CSS sites. There is an administrators' meeting this Friday including administrators from non-traditional school sites about participating in coaching sessions.

10. Old Business & New Business

- a. Response to IEP Updates - Family Engagement and Community Outreach Subcommittee
 - i. A few edits were made to the previously-distributed draft in their subcommittee meeting [Amended document is appended.]
 - ii. Amanda Campbell inquired about amending the document to ask for IEP minutes to be added to consent. Elizabeth Zielinski replied that her subcommittee considered the suggestion and had rejected it. She believes FCPS can't change the definition for consent, it would have to be altered at the state level. Could FCPS ensure parents see the minutes before they are requested to provide consent? Ms. Zielinsk replied yes. The completed IEP and minutes may go home for consideration before the family's signature.. They can see the minutes before signing. Ms. Campbell wants to know if there is the opportunity to say they will not sign the IEP until inaccuracies in the minutes are addressed. Ms. Zielinski replied that is addressed in item #14. She still doesn't think minutes fall in consent or non-consent.
 - iii. Finalization of the response with the subcommittee's amendments, to be submitted to the Department of Special Services, passes unanimously. [Response is appended.]
- b. Start of the winter break is the deadline for data requests from the subcommittees.

11. Member Time

- a. Elizabeth Zielinski - Moving on to Life in the Community Resource Fair is an FCPS event to be held at Willow Oaks tomorrow, November 10th with a presentation 6:30-7PM followed by an exhibitor fair. This event is co-sponsored by FCPS Career and Transition Services, the Arc of NoVA, the VA Dept. of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), and Fairfax Community Services Board
- b. Ally Baldassari -SEPTA's November general meeting features Rachel Gettler, an attorney in the USDOE Office for Civil Rights, on Bullying and Harassment of Students with Disabilities. This Tuesday, Nov. 15th, 7PM via Zoom., see www.fairfaxcountysepta.org. Saturday Dec. 3rd is SEPTA's IEP Palooza and Community Resource Fair at Annandale HS from 9am-12noon. Please see the website to register and get further details.
- c. Amanda Campbell - Shared testimony as Laura Jane Cohen's rep with the school board this past week. Last year she requested data on the speech support for AAC users through our ACSD Liaison Mike Bloom. The data she received show 897 AAC users, only 767 of which receive speech services. She considered that perhaps the discrepancy could be students who reached a fluency point speaking with their device, but most who didn't receive services were pre-schoolers. Considering AAC users by grade level, 12th grade has the highest number of AAC users with 144- preschool is the second highest number of users with 104 users, and next highest is kindergarten. AAC users receive 3 hours of speech services per month or less. Ms. Campbell notes in contrast that FCPS secondary students in world language courses receive 15 hours per month. Ms.

Campbell does not believe that classroom teachers are adequately trained to integrate AAC use into instruction. Ms. Campbell wants a model policy to make sure that staff are trained adequately to support AAC users and that AAC users have all the support services necessary.

12. Adjournment - 9:06 PM

PUBLIC COMMENT

[Written statement submitted by email; read aloud as written]

Good evening,

My name is Richard Johnson. I am presenting to the committee as both a Pre-K Autism Classroom (PAC) Teacher as well as a father of a child with autism. My hope is that we can consider the renaming of the PAC Classroom as well as Enhanced Autism Classroom (EAC) to reflect the classroom's population, teaching philosophy, and more importantly making the classroom more inviting to the families of newly diagnosed special education students.

Early on when I was going through the eligibility process for my own child, I was told that "the diagnosis doesn't matter, only the services we choose for the child". While in the practical sense, this is true- a child's diagnosis does not drive the services that they receive in the Early Childhood phase of education. Psychologically and emotionally, the diagnosis means everything to a family. A diagnosis of "autism" is equally terrifying as it is heart breaking for families as you cope with trying to figure out the next steps for supporting your child while simultaneously attempting to deal with your vision for your child's life being forever altered. A psychologist told me the grieving process of the diagnosis is much like losing a child in that there is period of denial before the eventual acceptance. And it is likely when families meet with FCPS staff a month after their child's Eligibility Meeting or even the coming years entering grade-level classes that they are still in that stage of denial. Because of this, when the discussion of the continuum of services offered by FCPS occurs them hearing about the possibility of their child joining a "Pre-K Autism Classroom" or "Enhanced Autism Classroom" can be overwhelming, thus there is often reluctance on their part about these programs. Simply stated- the families reject the possibility of their child joining the classroom in part because of the name. And accepting a placement proposal in an "Autism Classroom" could be forcing families to be in a place they are not ready to be.

Additionally, our classrooms utilize the principals of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) and Discrete Trial Teaching to address academic and behavioral needs of students. These methods are universal and are applied to classroom settings with students with disabilities and neurotypical development. It's the deliberate use of ABA and DTT that the Pre-K Autism Classroom uses that distinguishes this classroom setting from the other services offered on the Pre-K Special Education continuum and EAC from other special

education services offered at the grade level. The term Applied Behavior Analysis is more indicative of our classroom than “autism”. Many of the students in the classroom will never have a formal diagnosis of autism. They all are in the room because they need the teaching methods used in these classroom settings not because they have a specific diagnosis as the name of these classrooms implies.

I propose keeping the acronym the same for both settings while changing the official names. The “Pre-K Autism Classroom” would be changed to” Pre-K ABA Classroom” and the “Enhanced Autism Classroom” would become “Enhanced ABA Classroom”. As stated before, this change of name will serve as a more accurate description of the classroom while also respecting where our families are on their journey with their child’s diagnosis.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this matter.

[Written statement submitted by Sahar Qureshi by email; read aloud as written]

Good evening Advisory Council. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak with you tonight and bring something to the committee’s attention. About a year ago, FCPS had a consulting firm evaluate and take a survey of the school boundaries. Many parents responded and the consulting company provided an update/results of the survey. During that meeting, there was no mention about split feeder schools or special education programs. The majority of the focus was on advanced placement and language immersion. Currently, my child attends a split feeder school. You see, my sweet boy has the 3 A’s Autism, ADHD and Anxiety. He is limited verbally and has a hard time making friends naturally. At the beginning of every school year, I make it a point to speak to his General Education peers about Autism, what it is, what it isn’t, why he flaps, why he can’t make eye contact and so on and so forth. After years of this, finally they have formed relationships and they accept him and all his quirks. They in fact have gained knowledge and are so much more open minded then just ignoring the kid who flaps. He’s currently in fifth grade and the majority of his peers will be going to a different middle school than what we are assigned to. I know many of you may suggest that we can try pupil placement but I know, and as many parents can attest to, that option is an uphill and if not impossible battle to win. As you may know, children with Autism have a hard time making friends, let alone one that suffers from crippling anxiety. I have several classes of 5th graders, who know his quirks and idiosyncrasies. For him to be ripped apart from his peers for middle and high school will most certainly be detrimental to his mental health, social well being and making him an easy target for bullying.

Our boundary is over 40 years old before the current road infrastructure even existed. From his split feeder peers, he is the only special education student. The boundary line for the school that all the other kids will be going to starts less than 30 feet from my home. 30 feet!!!! That's it.

This split feeder would result in an extremely long bus ride, and more importantly loss of precious years long relationships/friendships. The ACSD and school board needs to reevaluate boundaries, get rid of split feeders and provide some leniency/exceptions in the pupil placement process for students with disabilities. Please think about this from all angles and not just within lines (pun intended). I appreciate your time.

[Comments delivered in person by Rachael Herndon]

Good evening ACSD,

My name is Rachael Herndon. My daughter Alice, who has Down syndrome, is currently enrolled in FCPS's preschool class-based program. We are a military family and are relatively new to Fairfax County. I am speaking on behalf of 9 families with preschool age children that are seeking inclusive preschool options. As is our collective experience, FCPS does not offer an inclusive preschool option for students with disabilities to have access to their typically developing peers. In April 2018 VDOE published their Virginia Guidelines for Early Childhood Inclusion. These guidelines outline how critical preschool inclusion is to improve the outcomes for students with disabilities. The benefits of inclusion in the early childhood education setting are foundational. Long term, inclusion in early childhood programs can set a path for inclusion throughout a student's life. Studies show that these students will require less supports in elementary, middle and high school, leading to better post-secondary options and better access to competitive employment. Additionally, research indicates that early childhood inclusion is beneficial to both children with and without disabilities. An inclusive preschool option is markedly absent at FCPS. Many of the surrounding school divisions in Virginia, to include Falls Church and Alexandria, have an inclusive preschool option. What has FCPS done or what is FCPS doing to create an inclusive preschool option for its students? Why aren't Headstart classes blended with the class-based preschool program? In our conversations with Denise Forrest, FCPS Director of Special Education Preschool Program, she indicated that there have been many roadblocks to adding an inclusive preschool option at FCPS. We have not received a clear answer as to what those roadblocks are or may have been. So, we are here asking ACSD, what are the roadblocks? Why hasn't FCPS joined surrounding divisions and pursued an inclusive preschool option? It is our aim to bring this issue to the attention of the ACSD. Our

sincere hope is that FCPS will focus on this critical, foundational issue for our students accessing preschool SPED services.

Thank you for your time.

[Comments delivered in person by Stephanie Waterhouse]

Good evening, I am here to speak to you about the importance of an inclusive preschool. Currently, FCPS does not have an inclusive preschool option that is accessible by all of its special education students. FCPS's failure to develop an inclusive preschool as suggested by OSEP guidance and VDOE has had a significant impact on my son's schooling. We are a military family and we were stationed here in May of 2021. While we were stationed at Fort Bragg and lived in Moore County, North Carolina, my son had access to a publicly funded, inclusive preschool environment. When we moved here, I was shocked to learn that Fairfax County, the 11th largest school district in the nation, and a county that purports itself to be progressive did not have a publicly funded, inclusive preschool environment that could be accessed by all of its special education students. Instead our son, and other military students, who come from inclusive school districts are shoved into contained classrooms, a more restrictive environment, simply because the opportunity to access an inclusive education is not available. This is really hard for military families because we move frequently. We may move every one to three years and it's even more difficult when your child is a special education student and even MORE difficult when the receiving school district can't even fulfill our children's basic rights to access a free, appropriate, public education as outlined in the LRE of their IEP. My son's LRE was determined to be an inclusive preschool environment by a team who had provided services to him for 2 years. When we moved here, Fairfax county told me over and over again, "We can't even do this IEP." In fact, they changed his LRE in his transfer IEP to a contained classroom, which meant that he could not access services. I can assure you that we are not the only family that this has happened to. This really sets a dangerous precedent for military students. Our children are placed in a more restrictive environment because FCPS refuses to honor the incoming IEP or even just satisfy FAPE. Eventually, we will move and the new receiving district will continue the more restrictive environment. It is important that Fairfax County establishes an inclusive preschool to ensure that incoming students, such as military students, can continue to access the appropriate LREs as well as to prepare other special education students for a successful academic experience in a general classroom setting.

Forty years of research shows that inclusion benefits all children. In fact, inclusion early on is a predictor for later inclusion and future success in a general education setting. IDEA is clear that high standards must be set and that IEPs should be developed to prepare students for future education, employment, and independent living. That goal starts with preschool and inclusion. I'm not sure if you're aware, but for the last 5 years, Fairfax County has not met the state standards for inclusion for students in preschool through high school. The problem with an inclusive education starts in preschool and clearly continues for the rest of their time in the school district. Fairfax County always talks about the importance of equity and diversity. I'm here to tell you that if you're doing equity and diversity without disabilities, you're doing it wrong. Thank you.

Member	Name	Organization/Representing	Orie	2 Me	11.9.22	14.1.28.28.212.10.2-0														
Ally	Baldassari	SEPTA	IP	IP	V	IP														
Amanda	Campbell	Springfield District-Laura Jane Cohen	V	IP	IP	V														
Anne	Hobbs	PoAC-NoVA	IP	IP	IP	V														
Brandis	Ruise	Fairfax Area Disabilities Services Board	IP	IP	IP	IP														
Brandon	Cassady	Member at Large-Karen Keys Gamarra	NYA	NYA	NYA	IP														
Carolyn	Haydon	Braddock District-Megan McLaughlin	IP	IP	IP	V														
Colleen	Jones	Fairfax County Council of PTA	IP	IP	IP	IP														
Daniel	Cronnell	Fairfax/Falls Church Community Services Board	IP	IP	IP	E														
Darcy	Acquavella	Fairfax City School Board		V	V	V														
David	Bean	Providence District-Karl Frisch	NYA	NYA	IP	IP														
Denise	Stitt	FCPS Teacher	IP	IP	IP	IP														
Elizabeth	Zielinski	Assistive Technology	IP	IP	V	IP														
Harry	Henderson	Mason District-Ricard Anderson	IP	IP	IP	IP														
Hideshi	Ishikawa	Region 5-Rebeca Baenig-Assistant Superintendent	NYA	NYA	IP	IP														
Holly	Stearns	Region 2-Fabio Zuluaga-Assistant Superintendent	NYA	NYA	IP	IP														
Jovieh	Liray	Fairfax County Health Department	E	E	V	V														
Kaitlinn	Erkilla	Mount Vernon District-Karen Corbett Sanders	IP	IP	V	IP														
Lauren	McCaughey	Hunter Mill District-Melanie Meren	IP	IP	IP	V														
Linda	Mason	Higher Education		V	V	E														
Michael	Simon	Sully District-Stella Pekarsky			V															
Nita	Payton	Region 1-Douglas Tyson-Assistant Superintendent	IP	IP	V															
Rachel	Charlton	Early Childhood Education (Preschool)	IP	IP	IP	V														
Randi	Cosentino	Dranesville District-Elain Tholen	IP	IP	IP	IP														
Sanaa	Bouzit	Member at Large-Abrar Omeish	IP	IP	IP	IP														
Sandi	Dallhoff	FC Dept. of Neighborhood and Community Service	NYA	NYA	IP	V														
Shannon	Duncan	Decoding Dyslexia Virginia		V	V	V														
Stephanie	Smith	Franconia District-Tamara Derenak Kaufax	NYA	NYA	IP	V														
Susan	Edgerton	Member at Large-Rachna Sizemore-Heizer		V	IP	IP														
Yasmeen	Merani	Student Representative	IP	IP	IP	IP														
Vacant		Region 3-Grace Taylor-Assistant Superintendent	car																	
Vacant		Region 4-Penny Gros-Assistant Superintendent																		
Vacant		Fairfax County Federation of Citizens																		
Vacant		League of Women Voters, Fairfax Area																		
Heather	Sable	Region 3-Grace Taylor-Assistant Superintendent	IP	IP	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Mirna	Galeano	Career and Transition Services	V	V	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
V	Attended virtually																			
IP	Attended in person																			
E	Excused absence																			
NYA	Not yet appointed; hadn't been appointed to this position at the time of the meeting																			
R	Resigned from the ACSD.																			

Please note that attendance was not required of returning members at the 9-14-2022 Orientation.

FCPS Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities

FINAL DRAFT Feedback on Proposed IEP Structural Changes (11/9/22)

Thank you for your presentation to the Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) on September 14, 2022 regarding the changes that the Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) Department of Special Services (DSS) proposes to make to IEPs, specifically the change from having a Present Level of Performance (PLOP) page to a Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) statement. State education policies and procedures require this committee to have input into such changes. We appreciate the opportunity to ask questions during your presentation and in writing for the record. This document discusses our remaining questions and concerns regarding the changes you propose.

Background

The ACSD is FCPS's state-mandated Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). Details about required SEAC involvement in changes to special education policies and procedures are available at <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter81/section230>.

DSS proposed changes to the IEP structure and trained teachers on them prior to the scheduled implementation date of September 12, without any ACSD engagement or parent training. However, public outcry about this failure to collaborate with ACSD as the state-mandated SEAC required FCPS to delay implementation. On September 14, DSS offered a presentation on the changes to ACSD, providing this body its first opportunity for feedback.

The ACSD's Executive Committee tasked its Family Engagement and Community Outreach Subcommittee (FECO) with providing formal feedback on the proposed changes. The FECO provides best practice recommendations about family engagement and community outreach for students with disabilities. This subcommittee also takes the lead in increasing awareness of the ACSD; engaging the community with the ACSD; increasing awareness of FCPS special education programs; and promoting effective collaboration among families, schools, and community partners. The subcommittee met on October 12, November 2, and November 9 to draft comments. The full ACSD formally approved these comments to be given as our feedback at its public meeting on November 9.

The Basis for These Changes Remains Unclear

DSS has not described adequately how the changes will bring IEPs in line with state law and/or regulation. The presentation on September 12 included generic statements about how the law has changed, but DSS has not referred to any specific change or provided details as to how its proposals will

meet the new requirements. Furthermore, an FCPS parent contacted the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to inquire about changes to the law; VDOE staff replied that the law has not changed.

We request a detailed description of both the specific changes to state law and/or regulation to which DSS refers and how changes will align IEPs with the new requirements.

Changes Should Be Coordinated with AIR Report Recommendations

The proposed IEP changes seem to be happening in tandem with, but not in coordination with, the substantial and comprehensive findings of the recently-published special education audit for which FCPS contracted with the American Institutes for Research (AIR). AIR published its findings, *Fairfax County Public Schools: Special Education Comprehensive Program Review, Year 2 Final Report*, in September 2022, and presented their findings to the school board at its work session on October 4. The proposed IEP changes and the report findings seem to be stovepiped from one another, when the report's findings should be informing any changes that FCPS makes.

The AIR report's 54 findings and 19 recommendations should form the foundation of any special education changes that FCPS develops. When questioned about why FCPS meant to implement changes to the IEP structure before the AIR recommendations became available, staff replied that they felt an urgency to bring IEPs within compliance of state special education law. However, the AIR report's findings are both comprehensive and significant. We request that DSS draft a public guidance document that clearly notes how its proposed changes meet any of the six IEP-related AIR Report recommendations. If the proposed changes do not meet all six AIR IEP-related recommendations, we request that FCPS redesign the IEP structure in collaboration with the ACSD and with AIR researchers during their three-month collaborative period.

Communication with All Stakeholders Is Lacking

The ACSD had not been informed by DSS of the proposed changes despite the fact that implementation was set for September 12. Bringing FCPS in line with other school districts and in accordance with state law are important goals. However, DSS disregarded state requirements to inform the ACSD of the procedural changes, failing to allow the ACSD the time needed to review them and provide recommendations. In the future, DSS must bring any proposed changes to IEP process, structure, and methodology to the ACSD for discussion and review a minimum of three months prior to suggested implementation dates. Aside from being mandated by law, transparency and open communication remove suspicion and promote collaboration and support.

DSS has not yet provided adequate information to the ACSD to enable full feedback on these proposed changes. It would be very helpful for our committee members to receive additional information, including access to the teacher training provided this summer that explains these proposed changes in detail. Internal work communications showing if/how DSS staff directly incorporated AIR's recommendations into these proposed changes would be very helpful as well. Showing how these

proposed changes precisely meet AIR's recommendations will form a solid foundation for explaining the proposed changes to the community.

DSS staff members say that parents are partners in the IEP process and that their input is valuable and required. Many of the AIR Report's findings show that parents do not feel that they are equal partners. For example, slide 12 of AIR's October 4 presentation to the school board includes the six IEP-related recommendations and 16 IEP-related findings. Many of these findings are alarming and prove a desperate need for change:

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- Page 53: "Nearly 38% of the IEPs in our sample did not include any written evidence of parent input within the IEP itself. Moreover ...only 20% of reports included evidence of parent input on the reevaluation reports."
 - Pages 53-54: "Our team assessed the extent to which the IEP sample included a rationale for why the special education setting(s) and services were selected (see Appendix Exhibit C21). This includes a rationale for why a student receives special education services in a general education class or why a student receives special education in a separate setting. Only 36% of the reviewed IEPs included a detailed rationale statement."
 - Finding 1g.1: "Data collected for this review showed that most IEPs do not provide a written rationale for the selection of IEP placement and services."
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Our committee supports changes to the IEP structure in response to the researchers' findings. FCPS must make any changes in direct correlation to the AIR recommendations. Dawn Schaefer, the Director of the Office of Special Education Procedural Support, said during the October subcommittee meeting that the AIR Report recommendations regarding IEPs should not be considered conclusive due to the report's small sample size. However, AIR's very qualified researchers spent two years carefully examining many data sources and engaging with the community in multiple ways. The report's findings should make DSS staff want to dig deeper.

Superintendent Reid has repeatedly said that "a system will produce the result that the system is designed to produce." The current system for training staff is producing insufficient parental input on IEPs, yet DSS's solution is to continue using the same system and expect better results.

DSS has provided no evidence of planned outreach to train families on these changes. When questioned at the ACSD's September meeting, the head of the Parent Resource Center (PRC), the purported arm for training parents, stated that she has received no information on the proposed changes. Harry Henderson, ACSD Chair, asked at the October meeting whether DSS has reached out to stakeholder organizations that could also train parents. The DSS reply was that it had no plans to do so. We recommend that DSS coordinate with stakeholder groups to provide training opportunities once all IEP changes have been finalized. Each school board member has a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) roundtable, each Regional Assistant Superintendent has a council of PTAs, the ACSD's members represent numerous stakeholder groups (such as SEPTA, Decoding Dyslexia, the Arc of Northern Virginia, and Parents of Autistic Children of Northern Virginia (POAC-NoVA). All provide opportunities to disseminate important information.

Our committee supports changes to the IEP structure to better reflect parent involvement as equal team members. Any process changes should be made collaboratively and transparently, allowing parents to receive similar training to that of staff, with ongoing communication from FCPS to ensure that parents understand the changes. Access to all IEP documentation is essential to parents being equal partners with school staff.

Further Requests for Clarification and Action

The ACSD requests clarification on a number of outstanding issues regarding the proposed IEP changes.

1. Has DSS begun work regarding parent input in the eligibility process? Do the proposed changes to the IEP structure include this?
Recommendation 1a. Create a standardized process and guidance for how staff should gather and document parent input during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes. (Findings 1f.4, 1j.2, and 4b.2)
2. Has DSS begun work on a Parent/Staff Collaboration Framework? Do the proposed changes to the IEP structure include this?
Recommendation 1b. Create a framework for parents and staff to enhance collaboration during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes. (Findings 1b.2, 4a.3., and 4b.2)
3. Has DSS begun work on data training? Do the proposed changes to the IEP structure include this?
Recommendation 1c. Establish guidance for staff to collect and report data more consistently to develop and monitor IEPs. (Findings 1b.3, 1f.2, 1f.3, 1f.4, 1g.1, and 1i.1)
4. Has DSS begun work on proposed changes to IEP Progress Reports? Do the proposed changes to the IEP structure include this?
Recommendation 1d. Revise the IEP progress report template and expectations so that staff report progress based on criteria specified in student IEPs rather than on a rating scale.
5. Do the proposed changes to the IEP structure allow for clearer monitoring of transition plans?
Recommendation 1e. Monitor postsecondary transition planning supports to ensure that students across all disability categories and their families have equitable access. (Findings 1h.3 and 1h.4)
6. Do the proposed changes to the IEP structure allow for clearly including the written rationale for the selection of IEP placement and services?
Recommendation 1f. Establish guidance on placement decisions for SWDs. (Finding 1g.1)
7. Please provide excerpts (from the summer training(s) provided to teachers) of all training sections regarding parent communications.
8. Were teachers trained to send a required email, for example, x days before any scheduled IEP meeting, with instructions such as, "Dear parent of (child), you have the opportunity to provide

written feedback for inclusion in the IEP by emailing it to (case manager) by (x date). In addition, parent feedback received during the meeting will be captured in the meeting minutes.”

9. Can advance parent feedback contain images? Is this feedback constrained in any way, or could parents theoretically submit a 50-page document with many images to be included in its entirety in SEA STARS? Is video allowed as part of this feedback?
10. Please provide a detailed timeline of the development of these proposed IEP changes, the creation of the teacher training(s), and the delivery of the training(s) on these changes, initially intended to begin implementation on September 12.
11. Please provide a detailed timeline of the development of planned training and planned communications to parents and students regarding these proposed IEP changes, initially intended to begin implementation on September 12.
12. Please provide a new proposed timeline regarding the development of training and planned communications to parents, students, and staff, along with a new proposed implementation date.
13. Who is tasked with reviewing the Special Education Parent Handbook and making needed changes? Will these proposed changes be shared with the ACSD for collaborative feedback prior to being published? By which date is the revision process expected to be completed?
14. Short of audio recording the IEP, how will parents feel that true discussions are documented if meeting minutes include just summaries that could potentially be watered down? Why would that documentation not be included in the legal portion of the document? Despite intent, practice holds that, “If it isn’t in the PLOP, it wasn’t discussed at the meeting.” If the legal document does not provide more than summaries of discussions it could hurt the student when no accurate documentation of concerns exists. This is of particular concern to military families who move often, and who rely on documentation to capture their needs and concerns in a way that will translate to a different school system.
15. Please confirm that teachers will receive updated training on any changes once they have been brought into alignment with AIR report recommendations.

The ACSD thanks FCPS for giving us the opportunity to provide this feedback regarding its proposed changes to the IEP structure, and we look forward to further engagement and collaboration this year and in coming years as we work together to strengthen special education in Fairfax County, using the AIR special education audit as a guide.

Sincerely,

Nita Payton and Holly Stearns
ACSD Family Engagement Subcommittee Co-Chairs

Members: Darcy Acquavella, Kaitlinn Erkilli, Hideshi Ishikawa, Lauren McCaughey, and Elizabeth Zielinski

Enclosures:

Appendix 1: American Institutes for Research, FCPS Special Education Comprehensive Program Review: Year 2 Final Report, pages 124-126 (six recommendations relating to IEPs)

Appendix 2: ACSD Executive Board's Letter to Dr. Michelle Boyd September 21, 2022

Appendix 3: DSS Responses dated October 10, 2022 to ACSD Questions from September

Appendix 1:

American Institutes for Research, FCPS Special Education Comprehensive Program Review: Year 2 Final Report, pages 124-126 (six recommendations relating to IEPs)

Area 1: Data-Driven IEP Development

Recommendation 1a. Create a standardized process and guidance for how staff should gather and document parent input during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes. (Findings 1f.4, 1j.2, and 4b.2)

Documenting parent input and concerns is paramount to keeping an accurate record of a student's performance and needs across time and demonstrates that parents have been included in the eligibility determination and IEP development processes in a meaningful way. It is an essential strategy to ensure that families can effectively advocate for their students. Data collected during the review showed that although most staff perceive that parent input is meaningfully incorporated into the IEP process, parents generally do not share this same perception (Finding 4b.2). Furthermore, there was limited evidence from the review of the IEP sample to demonstrate that parent input is fully and consistently documented within eligibility and IEP paperwork (Findings 1f.4 and 1j.2). Based on these findings, we recommend that FCPS establish standardized processes and guidance for how staff should gather and document parent input during the eligibility determination and IEP development process. Establishing guidance for staff will result in more purposeful inclusion of parent input at all stages of the special education process, and will have the ancillary benefit of documenting this input for compliance purposes. We believe this recommendation will help staff have a clearer understanding of how to meaningfully involve parents in decisions about their child's education and will ensure that the information documented in eligibility and IEP paperwork accurately reflects input from all stakeholders.

Recommendation 1b. Create a framework for parents and staff to enhance collaboration during the eligibility determination and IEP development processes. (Findings 1b.2, 4a.3., and 4b.2)

Parents are required members of the IEP team, and their role should be as collaborative partners with school staff. However, data collected during the review showed that both staff and parents routinely experience frustration and difficulties in the collaborative process to develop IEPs (Findings 4a.3 and 4b.2). In addition, some groups of parents reported dissatisfaction with the ease and efficiency of collaboration during the initial referral and evaluation process (Finding 1b.2). The positive examples of collaboration shared during this review demonstrate how strong family-school partnerships benefit students. However, the negative examples shared during this review demonstrate a concerning "us versus them" mentality in which families and school staff experience challenges, if not outright conflict, during the eligibility determination and IEP development process. For example, staff expressed that their professional expertise is not always respected by district administrators and parents. Moreover, parents expressed that their concerns about their child are not always taken seriously. As a result, many resort to hiring attorneys or advocates to get their child the support they need. This, in turn, increases the workload of teachers who are then limited in their ability to carry out quality implementation of programs and services for SWDs (Finding 4a.3). This creates a cycle of limited communication and collaboration; with an increased workload, teachers cannot effectively communicate with parents and families, which takes time that they may not have. We believe a collaboration framework will offer staff and parents tools to facilitate more purposeful family-school partnerships.

Recommendation 1c. Establish guidance for staff to collect and report data more consistently to develop and monitor IEPs. (Findings 1b.3, 1f.2, 1f.3, 1f.4, 1g.1, and 1i.1)

FCPS staff and parents overwhelmingly believe that IEPs are appropriately developed using multiple sources of data. However, our review of 300 IEPs found inconsistent quality and insufficient data-based information to guide IEP planning (Findings 1f.2, 1f.3, 1f.4, 1g.1, and 1i.1). Further review showed that although most initial evaluation reports include information from multiple domains, there was a preference for anecdotal forms of data (e.g., teacher input, observations) over more objective sources of data (Finding 1b.3). Based on these findings, we recommend that the district provide more individualized training to teachers and instructional assistants on data collection and reporting specifically tailored to the IEP process. These trainings should expand beyond the basics (e.g., how to navigate SEA-STARS) and focus on training staff to evaluate and report student progress using a data-driven approach. Acting on this recommendation will result in more individualized IEPs based on student needs. We believe a more tailored staff training is likely to lead to substantive improvements because a data-driven process will allow for a more accurate accounting of student needs and more appropriate goal setting.

Recommendation 1d. Revise the IEP progress report template and expectations so that staff report progress based on criteria specified in student IEPs rather than on a rating scale. (Finding 1i.1)

Data collected for this review showed a misalignment between IEP goals and the method for reporting progress on progress reports (Finding 1i.1). Data were obtained from an analysis of federal regulations for IEP reporting, a review of current progress report documents, and parent perceptions of the usefulness of the information from the progress reports. Based on these findings, we recommend that FCPS revise the progress report template to require staff to report progress based on the criterion outlined in each annual goal:

- Sample goal: [student’s name] will solve multistep grade-level problems (i.e., compare, order, and find equivalent fractions, decimals, and percentages; solve practical problems using proportional reasoning; solve one- and two-step linear equations in one variable), as shown by 75% accuracy on two of three assignments/assessments quarterly.
- Current method of reporting progress: 3—Student is making some progress toward the goal.
- Suggested progress report update: [student’s name] solves multistep grade-level problems with 65% accuracy, 68% accuracy, and 62% accuracy on the last three assessments in quarter 2.

Acting on this recommendation will result in a more individualized, cohesive, and data-driven approach to monitoring progress on annual goals. We believe that this revision of the progress report template and expectations is likely to lead to substantive improvements because it will reinforce a data-driven approach to writing and monitoring annual IEP goals for staff and will provide more individualized information to parents of SWDs each quarter. Improvements in the progress report template will allow for a more accurate accounting of student progress over time and will enhance communication with parents.

Recommendation 1e. Monitor postsecondary transition planning supports to ensure that students across all disability categories and their families have equitable access. (Findings 1h.3 and 1h.4)

Federal regulations require transition planning for all SWDs starting at the age of 16 (or earlier if required by a certain state). Data collected for this review showed that although transition plans are included in most FCPS IEPs, inequities exist for the quality of transition supports across disability categories (Finding 1h.4). Specifically, we noted that parents perceive access to school- and community-based supports differently based on the disability of their child. We also noted misalignment between transition goals and transition services, more notably for some disability categories than others (Finding

1h.3). Based on these findings, we recommend that FCPS monitor transition-planning supports to ensure that students across all disability categories and their families have equitable access. Actively monitoring transition planning and services will result in more equitable access to these services across all SWDs.

Recommendation 1f. Establish guidance on placement decisions for SWDs. (*Finding 1g.1*)

Data collected for this review showed that most IEPs do not provide a written rationale for the selection of IEP placement and services (Finding 1g.1). Based on this finding, we recommend that FCPS establish district guidance on making and documenting placement decisions. The guidance should include considerations for student needs, parent input, and the least restrictive environment. Creating this guidance will provide IEP teams with a consistent framework for making decisions and will establish expectations for how these decisions are documented in each IEP.