

Advisory Committee for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) - Fairfax County Public Schools
Wednesday, September 13 2023, 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Summary of Business Conducted:

- The ACSD voted to discontinue the practice of an ACSD Fall Retreat.
- The ACSD heard updates from the Department of Special Services (DSS) regarding current staffing shortages and methods to fill vacant positions and support schools with vacancies and provisionally license teachers, on the fulfillment of services required by compensatory education plans (from the Office of Civil Rights Resolution), and the Early Childhood Education Plan to immediately address shortcomings in inclusive opportunities for special education preschool students.

Pending Feedback from the Department of Special Services that was Offered/Requested as a Result of This Meeting, or Still Pending from Meetings Previous

- Information on how to start the process on bringing a wheelchair division to FCPS sports
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Executive Committee:

Chair, Elizabeth Zielinski

Vice Chair, Holly Stearns

Secretary, Ally Baldassari

Member Attendance: A quorum of voting members was confirmed by the ACSD Co-Chairs with 15/21 voting members in attendance. There are 34 positions on the ACSD; 5 pending approval, and 8 currently vacant. The full record of attendance, members, and vacancies is appended.

Liaisons/FCPS Guests:

Mike Bloom, Director, Office of Special Education Instruction and FCPS Liaison to the ACSD

Terri Edmunds-Heard, Interim Assistant Superintendent, Department of Special Services

Dawn Schaefer, Director of Special Education Procedural Support

Rachna Seizmore-Heizer, School Board Liaison

Kathy Murphy, Assistant Ombuds for Special Education

Prior to the business meeting, there was an orientation for new members from 6:00 - 6:45 PM.

During this orientation, new members (and a few returning members present)

- Introduced themselves and stated their “why” for serving on the ACSD
- Were given information on the the role/responsibilities of of ACSD members
- Discussed the Department of Special Services (DSS) and the offices and services within
- Discussed ACSD meeting norms
- Became informed of the Sunshine laws

- Were told of the ACSD's four standing subcommittees; and all members must serve on one
- Reviewed Roberts Rules
- Reviewed who on the ACSD to call with various concerns

Business Meeting Agenda date:

1. Call to Order, Elizabeth Zielinski, Chair
2. Approval of Minutes and Adoption of Agenda, Ms. Zielinski
3. General Announcements, Ms. Zielinski - None at this time
4. Public Comment, Holly Stearns, Vice Chair
 - a. Maria Ordish - Has a son with ADHD who is now in middle school. Ms. Ordish recommends FCPS develop a course for teachers and administrators on ADHD, as she believes the experience and skill of her son's past teachers has varied greatly and that has impacted his experience in school and her collaboration with school staff.
 - b. Sahar Qureshi - Ms. Qureshi has been trying to register her concerns about the school boundary determinations allowing split feeder schools, which can have a negative impact on students with disabilities. She reports that she and other parents registered these concerns in a survey, but they were ignored. Her son is now a 6th grader, and will attend middle school next year at a different school than many of his peers who have taken the time and effort to get to know him and understand his idiosyncrasies.
 - c. Callie Oettinger - Ms. Oettinger presented concerns related to addressing vision therapy needs when a student has been identified as being impacted in his/her IEP. Also, noted concerns about a desired change in staff.
5. Chair's Message, Ms. Zielinski
 - a. This year, the ACSD will be meeting in person although there will be three opportunities for virtual attendance. It is likely that these opportunities will be used when we encounter inclement weather.
 - b. A work calendar will be shared with the entire committee.
 - c. A contact sheet that is organized by subject matter will be disseminated to the committee.
 - d. Each subcommittee will be tasked with mini-charges to begin the year to help facilitate a positive start to advocacy work (e.g., examining preschool inclusion concerns).
 - e. Questions for the Record - Index cards will be provided during in-person meetings for individuals to submit their questions in writing. These question cards will be submitted to the Vice Chair, Holly S.
 - f. The aforementioned documents will be provided either via email or made accessible on the ACSD website.

- g. Member expectations - To actively participate in the discussions, reduce side conversations, and be mindful that meetings are recorded and viewed by the public.

Questions:

- Will index cards be provided at each meeting? A: Yes
 - Will we receive answers from previously submitted questions for the record from the previous years? A: We are working on securing responses but we will continue to track them.
- h. Mr. Bloom reviewed the School Board Charge for 2023-2024. The Charge includes reviewing the provisions for determining speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and counseling services; comparing with evidence, research-based and best practice; making recommendations for selecting students; and the awarding and delivery of services.
 - i. The ACSD Chair shared background information that helped shape her collaboration with Mr. Bloom on developing the Charge.
 - j. Ms. Zielinski reminded the committee that our work on behalf of the school board is advisory; our recommendations are not compulsory.
6. School Board Liaison Update, Rachna Sizemore-Heizer, Member-at-Large
- a. Ms. Sizemore-Heizer introduced herself and shared her history of serving on the ACSD prior to serving on the School Board.
 - b. Highlighted issues....Special Education Enhancement Plan, Inclusive preschool
7. Family Resource Center (FRC) News, Mr. Bloom on behalf of Mary Beth Harrison-Cunningham, Manager of the FRC
- a. Mr. Bloom demonstrated and shared [FRC's website](#)
 - b. The FRC offers free webinars and consultations.
 - c. The [FRC YouTube channel](#) is an archive of previous workshops that are available on YouTube, online newsletters, and other digital resources.
8. Attendance Report, Ms. Stearns [for Ally Baldassari, Recording Secretary, not in attendance]
As above.
9. Department of Special Services (DSS) Updates, Dr. Terri Edmunds-Heard, Mike Bloom, and Dawn Schaefer
- a. Mike Bloom introduced Dr. Terri Edmunds-Heard and she provided some information about her background. She is from Virginia originally and has worked in a variety of states in the special education field. The majority of her teacher experience took place in the elementary school setting, although she also gained some experience in the middle school setting. Presently, she is doing “a lot of listening and a lot of learning” as she becomes acclimated to DSS.

- b. Mike Bloom provided some DSS Updates -
 - i. Staff recruitment and retention: 600 special education teacher vacancies in July was reduced to 130 by the start of the school year through hard work with the Human Resources Department.
 - ii. 24 Central office staff were deployed to schools to fill teacher vacancies.
 - iii. As hiring continues, twelve Central Office staff are still deployed in classrooms; 4 curriculum resource teachers, 3 ABA coaches, 3 ATS resource teachers, 1 behavior intervention teacher, and 1 mentor coach. This number is continuing to decrease as more positions are filled.
 - iv. There are 77 teacher trainees (formerly “teacher residents”) seeking a special education endorsement, 262 long-term substitutes, and 500 provisionally-licensed special education teachers. Teacher trainees already have a bachelor’s degree, must commit to enrolling in an approved SPED intro course approved by the VDOE within 30 days of hire, and agree to complete coursework and obtain licensure within 3 years.
 - v. To support the provisionally-licensed teachers, there are cohorts that meet monthly, mentors, and supports for both the teachers and their administrators.
- c. Dawn Schaefer provided some DSS Updates regarding Compensatory Instruction.
 - i. FCPS has delivered almost 50% of the required instruction.
 - ii. Summer school was offered and various locations were established to provide compensatory services on Saturdays. Service delivery is continuing with Saturday delivery option, and the plan is to offer summer services again in 2024.
 - iii. Families will be reimbursed for compensatory services provided by an external provider or FCPS will pay the vendors directly.
 - iv. There’s also been the addition of an administrator, Deb Scott, to help with the management of the Compensatory Education Plan, as there have been notable staffing changes.
- d. Rachna Sizemore Heizer - Families have contacted her about delays being experienced in relation to external providers being reimbursed. It was encouraged that families have the vendors connect with FCPS directly. This change can be proposed to one’s IEP team to help with this process.
- e. Early Childhood Inclusion Plan - Immediate, short-term plan to expand inclusive preschool in the short-term. Each school that has an Early Childhood Special Education program was required to create a plan to help move this initiative forward.
 - i. Why: To provide developmentally-appropriate access for preschool special education students to engage with general-education peers. This will help the gen-ed peers develop empathy and social skills with peers of all abilities, and

help achieve goals in FCPS's Strategic Plan and Special Education Enhancement Plan (SEEP) to meet LRE IEP criteria and Indicator 6 data for VDOE.

- ii. For 2023-24: Community Peers Program (Early Childhood Special Education only schools – these schools are not already co-located with a non-special ed preschool program; such a program was formerly called Head Start.) Community peers of preschool age are invited to participate in those classes.
- iii. For 2023-24: Inclusion experiences at co-located sites where both a preschool and Early Childhood Special Education program exist - These programs are asked to provide inclusion opportunities.
- iv. For 2024-25: Early Childhood Inclusion Program expansion - There are already seven pre-existing programs that are implemented within a co-teaching model (8 general education students and 6 special education students). In the future, the idea is that this program will expand to include 60 classrooms.

Questions:

1. What is the difference between (formerly) Head Start and the current Pre-K? A: Only the terminology has changed.
2. How do you get the time at the base school back when your schedule demands include appointments (e.g., physical therapy)? How do you account for time taken away from socialization opportunities? A: The services specified in a child's IEP should account for the related services he/she needs, and those services should follow them.
3. In relation to crisis response teams, which may not be classroom based and may consist of teachers being pulled from a classroom. What is DSS doing to establish independent crisis response teams, particularly at public day schools? A: FCPS requires that staff receive crisis response training (MANDT and PCM) and additional staff in various schools. Some schools have extra staff, such as Burke, who can mobilize quickly. As part of the Special Education Enhancement Plan, DSS will review public day sites, staff, and related needs. As part of this review, they will make additional staffing recommendations.
4. In relation to inclusive preschools, how will the community peers be selected? A: The Coordinator of the Early Childhood Special Education Team has created a handbook for principals (where Early Childhood Special Education programs are established) to identify community peers. Some principals invite the children of their staff or buss drivers to participate as community peers.
5. In relation to the Compensatory Education Plan, have there been thoughts about the financial ramifications? Rachna Sizemore-Heizer: There were funds set aside within the budget to pay for this instruction. Funding comes from local and state sources. For the next meeting, Ms. Sizemore-Heizer encouraged members to look

on the Virginia government site and advocate for education with their local representative. She also suggested potentially bringing in the local government specialist to speak to the ACSD.

6. Compensatory Education Payments - Is it possible to inform families of where they are in the process? Some families have not received any updates for an extended period of time. Can there be public messaging regarding how timing may be managed or unfold? A: DSS is working on updating the website to include information about the status of payments. It takes about 30 minutes (in a best-case scenario for an application with no issues) for an administrator to review paperwork for a given family and then that information is submitted to a financial representative, who may need a few hours to review the related documents. It is recognized that there is a backlog of payment.
7. In relation to in-school and out-of-school suspension, is there a consideration of how these processes affect students, are managed by schools, and may place an added demand on school staff? A: There are a few different structures involved in such discipline matters. The first would be Dawn Schaefer's office and addressing needs in the IEP teams, and other the processes set out in the Students Rights and Responsibilities manual. Additionally, FCPS has developed a number of plans to address different disciplinary paths (e.g., Restorative Practices and the Collaborative and Proactive Solutions program). This question will be presented to DSS colleagues to further investigate.

10. Old Business & New Business, Ms. Zielinski

- a. "Fall Retreat" as specified in ACSD Bylaws (2021 rev.). Ms. Stearns made a motion to cancel the Fall Retreat that is written in the Bylaws. The motion was put forth for a vote, seconded, and approved.

11. Member Time, Ms. Stearns

- a. Harry Henderson - Thanked Mike Bloom for speaking at his Rotary Club about special education.
- b. Lauren McCaughey - Recommended Sib Shops to other members. (This is offered on the Family Resource website)
- c. Brandon Cassady - Is it possible to make a pledge to bring a wheelchair division FCPS sports? (So far a letter has been drafted.) Mike Bloom: Agreed to gather more information about moving forward and act as a liaison for the idea of garnering support to establish a wheelchair sport division. He promised to report back with more information at the next meeting regarding the next steps to move forward. Dr. Reid had noted to the ACSD that she had a wheelchair division at her former school in which she was the superintendent.

- d. Chair shared information about VDOE website that provides information about SEACs
- e. Rachna Sizemore Heizer - College Autism Summit in Nashville in October
- f. Ms. McCaughey. - The FCPS Special Education PTA (SEPTA) will hold its first general membership meeting on Sept 27. Dr. Edmunds-Heard and other FCPS staff will attend.

12. Adjournment - Approximately 9:40 PM

PUBLIC COMMENT

A.

Good morning,

My son now attends Cooper Middle School. He has ADHD and anxiety. I would like to propose FCPS develop and short informative course for teachers and administrators on ADHD. Most teachers do not seem to know what it is and how to deal with it.

At my son's former elementary school, the 5th grade teacher was completely in the dark, while his 6th grade teacher was fully informed. The difference in his education, treatment, and our communication with those teachers was night and day.

I suggested to the principal that she hold a meeting to educate the educators. ADHD is an executive functioning disorder and that information....makes ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

Also, pointers on approach and handling would be terrific. Many teachers kept expecting him to be able to just stop and suddenly be someone different.

As parents, my husband and I engage therapy, medications, and tools at home to help our son. We reach out to teachers and provide them all the resources and help we can. And yes, we have a 504c. This isn't always the case, I am sure, however, educating schools would help immensely.

Our son doesn't try to difficult, and he hates having ADHD. He sits at home and cries because he wishes it would just go away. Understanding goes a long way with this disability. Can't we help these kids? It's bad enough kids call him weird, but he also knows when teachers think he is simply a nuisance.

At the end of last year, my son said about Ms. Vichness..."She knew I was a challenge, but she never made me feel like I was a problem."

That speaks volumes.

Thank you,
Maria Ordish

B.

Good evening Advisory Council.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit my testimony and bring forth again something to the committee's attention. About 2+ years 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 a meeting reviewing the results of the survey, 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. My 6th's grader is in the Enhanced Autism program and is in his classroom for a vast majority of his day. 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. Even some inviting us for play dates and parties (which as most Sped Parents can tell you doesn't happen often) They in fact have gained knowledge and are so much more open minded then just ignoring the kid who flaps. 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 6th graders (from 2 different local schools), 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. Not to mention the regression of skills and behaviors. Our boundary is over 40 years old before the current road and 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. If it was a mile or more, I can understand the district's resistance. But 30 feet is next to nothing.

We are only 2.1 from our unassigned school vs. 4.4 from our assigned school.

This split feeder would result in an extremely long bus ride, and more importantly loss of precious years long relationships/friendships which he and I have worked to build. 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 beyond what has been drawn out in the form of boundaries. I appreciate your time.

Thank you,
Sahar Qureshi