



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting

March 25, 2015

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:50 p.m. The following AB SpEd PAC Board members attended the meeting: Amanda Bailey, Bill Guthlein, Nancy Sherburne, Jeanne Hobbie, and Carolyn Sprague. Will Barker from Friends of AB SpEd PAC, Pupil Services Liaison Julie Towell, School Committee liaison to the PAC Paul Murphy, and seven others were also in attendance.

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from September 24, 2014 were reviewed and a vote deferred to next meeting.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Director of Pupil Services Finalist Community Forum

Amanda provided an update on the search for a new Director of Pupil Services. The PAC does not support one candidate over another because we will strive to develop a good working relationship with whichever candidate is hired. Of three finalists, one has withdrawn from consideration, and the other two, Dr. Karen Zaleski and Mary Emmons, presented and took questions at a parent forum. Approximately 30 people attended the forum, representing a good mix of parents and staff and including several School Committee members. The district is collecting feedback forms through Friday this week. The PAC encourages parents to send in their thoughts on the respective qualities of the candidates. The next step will be site visits. A decision is expected as early as next week.

B. Parent Letter Regarding Pupil Services Director Search Process

A group of parents put together a letter to the Superintendent and the Pupil Services Director search committee expressing concern about the timeframe for the search process. The Superintendent has addressed these issues, outlining how the process works and why it was done this way. The main factor driving the schedule was not knowing of the opening until late in the school year. The Superintendent reiterated his commitment to collaboration and communication with parents.

C. Updates from Quarterly Meeting with Pupil Services

The quarterly meeting with Pupil Services was cancelled. However, there were several updates from ongoing communications:

- A decision has been made to proceed with the Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) training for grades 4-6 to begin next fall.
- On the topic of mental health, the district is working in collaboration with MSPP Interface referral service to provide access to services for families in crisis. This is an initiative of the Massachusetts School of Professional

Psychology's Richard and Joan Freedman Center. The service collects, categorizes, and makes available a wide range of critical resources related to mental health and wellness for the benefit of the general public - children, adults, and families - as well as educators and mental health professionals. It provides free confidential referrals, matching families with licensed mental health providers. The PAC has offered space on our website to link to this service and increase access for families.

- The PAC anticipates updates to the bullying prevention plan and policy.
- The PAC became aware of two cases in which parents requesting evaluations for their elementary-school-aged children were denied. The Pupil Services Liaison affirmed that the Acting Pupil Services Director understands that evaluation requests must be honored and is following up on the issue. FCSN provides information about the referral and evaluation process through their Basic Rights workshop which the PAC offers annually.
- The Acting Pupil Services Director followed up on "take a break" room use at the PAC's request. The issue was initially raised in July with Liza Huber. Preliminary findings are that the room had no locks, it had windows and a bean bag chair, staff remained outside, and it was used for de-escalation. Parents reported the room was being used against their wishes and outside the IEP process and that they were called to take their child home even though when they arrived the child appeared capable of returning to the classroom. The PAC wishes parents to know that the decision to use the room should be part of a behavior plan in the IEP in which the child is being taught to independently self-regulate. The Pupil Services Liaison observed that there are strict guidelines on issues such as restraining and escorting children through Chapter 22 state regulations, that there is ongoing District training from third party companies on de-escalation techniques, and that logs are kept.
- The PAC has approached Pupil Services regarding executive function training. A couple of special educators are successfully using a system specifically developed by Landmark in the junior high school and high school. The district is looking to expand that. The PAC feels executive functioning needs to be a sequenced set of skills taught across the board from early elementary through high school.
- There have been concerns from Boxborough parents about the Extended School Year (ESY). In Acton, ESY is four weeks long. Boxborough has typically held classes for six weeks and the Boxborough program is being changed to match Acton's. The Elementary Coordinator is looking at camp options. The Acting Pupil Services Director reports there is only an eight-hour difference between the total number of hours of the two programs (142 hours versus 150). Community Education will be reducing their summer program in 2015 because of the short summer this year.
- In an update on addressing students' social-emotional needs, the district is looking at enhancing social-emotional opportunities at the elementary school level by adding extracurricular options and social outlets. The PAC is adding a question to its survey to assess interest in such extracurricular activities. The district is also looking at common language around addressing social-emotional needs across schools. The PAC remains concerned about the level

of response by the district. As a model for extracurricular activities, we are interested in Sudbury's approach: a specialist built an inclusive and integrated summer program with supported classes labeled by an icon in the catalogue. AB Community Education had trained special educators providing support for 3 or 4 students; however, they are seeing lower enrollment and cancelled several classes as a result. Other options are being considered.

- The Pupil Services Liaison discussed a needs assessment by Acton United Way that has a broad spectrum of focus and is seeking to identify needs across income levels. A panel of people are looking at it. The survey does not accept partial input.
- The quarterly meeting with Pupil Services will be rescheduled for next week.

D. Superintendent's Community Forum

At the Superintendent's forum last week school budget priorities and cuts put forth were discussed (a video explaining the same is posted the Office of the Superintendent page at abschools.org). He also presented his Entry Plan findings report. There were ~1100 respondents to his online survey. Additionally, he interviewed many people both internally (administrators and faculty) and externally (parents and community stakeholders). In Special Education, extensive challenges with communication, transparency, decision-making, and overall trust were noted. The Superintendent plans to review all findings and will check in again with stakeholders.

E. League of Women Voters Forum – School Committee Candidates

The Acton League of Women Voters will be holding a forum for the School Committee candidates for the March 31st Acton election. There are two openings and three candidates running in Acton; Boxborough has one seat up for vote in May. The event will be televised and posted online. Members are encouraged to listen to the candidates speak and then please vote.

F. Federation for Children with Special Needs Advancing Parent Professional Leadership in Education (APPLE) Institute

In a positive outreach by the Acting Pupil Services Director, district and PAC leaders will be attending a three-day conference moderated by the Federation for Children with Special Needs. The purpose of the conference is relationship building through collective discussion and consensus development of a joint team action plan with a vision and timeline. The history of parent involvement and the role of the PAC will also be discussed.

G. Letter to the Superintendent RE: the Role of the AB SpEd PAC

The PAC sent a letter on March 23rd to the Superintendent about the role of the PAC in recent years, its accomplishments, collaboration with Pupil Services, benefits to the district from this partnership, and our understanding of the PAC's legal mandate. It was an outreach to initiate conversation in the context of changes at many levels for both the district and PAC with the goal of arriving at consensus on a joint vision for PAC participation.

H. Dr. Jeff Bostic's Presentation

Dr. Bostic's presentation on mental health issues has been scheduled for April 7th in R.J. Grey auditorium at 7 p.m. Unfortunately, it was recognized at the meeting that this coincides with the annual Acton town meeting.

I. Parenting Challenging Children Meeting April 14th at the Fowler Branch of the Concord Free Library

The new Parenting Challenging Children Support Group will be holding its second meeting on Tuesday, April 14th, at the Fowler Branch of the Concord Free Library at 10:30 a.m. All parents/guardians are invited; young children are welcome, but no supervision is available. Refreshments will be provided. This meeting will be facilitated by Blossom Davies, Jeanne Hobbie, and Carolyn Sprague.

J. Updates on Other Topics, Goals & Priorities for 2014-2015

- IEP/504 Sign-Off update: A question regarding the need for an IEP/504 sign-off by regular education teachers will be included in the PAC parent/guardian survey. The Acting Pupil Services Director will draft a memo to principals regarding the distribution of IEPs and asking them to remind all staff of their responsibility for reading and being familiar with the needs of their students. A parent pointed out that in her experience it's an issue of timing; some students need their teachers to know of certain issues before the start of classes in the fall.
- The update to the parent handbook is in progress. Pupil Services has updated the program information. Further work is anticipated. A parent asked whether the handbook would include a section for students ages 18-22, to which Nancy responded that for this age group support is highly individualized. The parent asked if it might be possible to broadly describe some options in ODP (Occupational Development Program), the community, internships, community college, and classes at the high school.
- There has been some discussion over the PAC's name, particularly negative associations with the term "SpEd." However, since the Friends of AB SpEd PAC is now a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit, it would cost money to change the name. This is in addition to the logistics of changing the site name, all supporting documentation, printed materials, the handbook, and so on. The Pupil Services Liaison pointed out that from a school perspective DESE advises not identifying "SpEd kids." Noting lack of strong parent feeling either way, a decision was deferred.
- Amanda recently attended a disclosure conference through the Asperger Autism Network (AANE) and was moved to ask what training is provided to typically developing students about disabilities. She wonders if there would be interest as it ties into issues such as bullying prevention. Other members mentioned programs they know that provide such opportunities. The Pupil Services Liaison pointed out that the integrated program at the preschool is a form of training for some students. However, it's helpful to provide training to more children to help them understand the differences they notice. Awareness demystifies and promotes integrated inclusion.

- IV. Adjournment – the meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.
- V. Next Meeting – will be on April 15, 2015, at 7:30 pm in the R.J. Grey Library.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Sprague, Secretary