



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting

April 15, 2015

- I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:36 pm. The following AB SpEd PAC Board members attended the meeting: Amanda Bailey, Bill Guthlein, Nancy Sherburne, Julie Towell, and Paul Murphy. Eight other PAC/community members also attended the meeting.
- II. Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes for September 24, 2014 were reviewed. A motion was made to approve the minutes as written. The motion was seconded and approved with two visiting students abstaining from the vote.
- III. Organizational/Business Issues
 - A. Update on Pupil Services Director Search

The district has decided to take a step back and reopen the search for a new Pupil Services Director in November 2015. They didn't receive as many qualified candidates for the position as they had hoped and one of the finalists withdrew from the process. By postponing the search and beginning the process earlier next year, they hope to garner a strong pool of candidates for this position. Mary Emmons will continue as the Acting Director of Pupil Services through the end of this school year.
 - B. Quarterly PAC Meeting with Pupil Services
 - Pupil Services shared that parent requests for initial special education evaluation of a child will be honored anytime a parent suspects a disability. There were a couple of cases earlier in the year where this didn't happen at the elementary level.
 - Pupil Services confirmed the department's ongoing commitment to responding to parents phone calls and emails within 24-48 hours of contact.
 - We discussed possible changes in the works to Boxborough's Extended School Year program this summer. Some parents had reported that the number of weeks and hours of service in Boxborough had been reduced this year. We also discussed how many students were participating in Acton's ESY program that includes integrated programming through Community Ed. to facilitate social skills development. There was discussion about how students are currently being selected to participate in this program – Special Ed. Coordinator appointment vs. Team recommendation.
 - We discussed the distinction between a medical vs. educational autism diagnosis noting that the law gives schools the authority to make an educational autism diagnosis. The school has been reluctant to make

educational autism diagnoses in the past; however, they are open to exploring this possibility and having school psychologists make this diagnosis when it is suspected. The PAC encourages early, accurate diagnosis so that students get the integrated support they need at the earliest age possible and so that staff and specialists working with students understand the bigger picture of this diagnosis instead of addressing individual components in isolation.

- We also discussed greater use of technology in the IEP development process to expedite and streamline IEP generation. Pupil Services shared that the state is currently designing new IEP forms, which don't use ESPED – the software the district currently uses to generate IEPs. The new forms may lead to better automation of the process in our district.

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

Mary Emmons, Julie Towell, Amanda Bailey and Nancy Sherburne attended the APPLE Institute at the district's invitation and Glenn Brand joined us for part of the last day. This 3-day seminar was designed to improve understanding and partnership between parents and professionals in education. The workshop was hosted by the Federation and run by a professional facilitator. Well-researched, evidence-based techniques were taught relating to discussion, brain-storming and problem-solving, understanding different personality profiles and strengths, and transition and change management. Everyone who attended felt it was a good use of time that resulted in a better understanding of one another and the creation of a joint vision and action plan to improve relationships and student outcomes in the next 1-3 years.

D. Acton Town Meeting and School Committee Election Results

The School budget passed at Town Meeting and Deanne O'Sullivan and Diane Baum are the two new School Committee members. It was a very tight School Committee race and the third candidate only lost by 1 vote, highlighting the importance of getting out to vote in local elections.

E. Parenting Challenging Children Meeting

Our new parent support group, Parenting Challenging Children will meet at 10:30 on May 12th at Concord's Fowler Library. Please join us in sharing resources, information and personal experiences. This group is open to all parents of Pre-K through high school aged children and not limited to parents of children with special needs. Feel free to bring a friend – all are welcome.

F. Dr. Jeff Bostic's Presentation

Dr. Bostic's presentation on Mental Health Issues in Children and Teens has been rescheduled to Tuesday, June 2nd at 7:00 pm in the R. J. Grey Junior High Auditorium.

- G. Updates on Other Goals and Objectives for 2014-2015
- The PAC's Parent Survey is almost ready for release. We just need to solve some logistical issues with Constant Contact.
 - The Special Education Parent Handbook update has been on the back burner with everything else going on this year. However, we hope to complete the update by the end of the year.

IV. New Business

- Parents unable to afford a private neuropsych evaluation can request a comprehensive evaluation from the district and can ask for financial assistance from the district if they meet the financial criteria set out by the state. Parents should send any such request in writing to the age or grade appropriate Special Education Coordinator.
- Parents wished there was one location they could reference that included all services, schools and programs for students with special needs. It was noted that the DESE website lists all 766 accredited schools in MA, that MAPS has a list of all accredited private schools in MA and that there is also a list of all accredited charter schools in the state. The Concord SpEd PAC website also has a good list of private schools and a description of the type of student needs each supports. Mass PAC and Family Voices were other sources of good information shared by parents.

V. Adjournment – the meeting was adjourned at 9:20 pm.

VI. Next Meeting – May 27, 2015 at 7:30 pm in the R. J. Grey Junior High Library.

Respectfully submitted by Nancy Sherburne, Past PAC Chair