



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting

May 27, 2015

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m. The following AB SpEd PAC board members attended the meeting: Amanda Bailey, Bill Guthlein, Nancy Sherburne, and Carolyn Sprague. Will Barker from Friends of AB SpEd PAC, Julie Towell from Pupil Services, School Committee liaison Paul Murphy, and three other PAC members were also in attendance.

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the April 14, 2015, meeting were reviewed. A motion was made to accept the minutes as written, the motion was seconded, and the minutes passed unanimously.

III. Organization/Business Issues

A. Update on Director of Special Education Appointment

Mary Emmons has been appointed to the position of Director of Special Education. The search for a permanent Director of Pupil Services will reopen in the fall. The same search committee that oversaw the Director of Pupil Services search earlier this year will be interviewing candidates for an Interim Director of Pupil Services to hold the role in the 2015-2016 school year. A parent wondered about the makeup of the search committee, commenting that it would be unusual for private sector employees to be hiring their boss.

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

As previously reported, executive PAC members and Pupil Services leadership attended this seminar to advance the relationship between PAC and Pupil Services with the common goal of improving student outcomes. A team action plan was developed. Research-based tools to help with facilitation were reviewed.

The first follow-up meeting was held this month and facilitated by MassPAC Coordinator Leslie Leslie of the Federation for Children with Special Needs. How to continue to meet the PAC's legal mandate of aiding in the planning, development, and evaluation of special education programs was discussed, as was establishing new and enhancing existing communication channels. The PAC relies on Pupil Services to distribute information to parents. Mary Emmons was designated as the main point person and will be liaison at PAC meetings. Mary committed to monthly meetings with PAC officers and the PAC is invited to present at staff meetings in the fall to meet the new Educational Team Leads (ETLs). It was decided to work on co-sponsoring public events, which will help raise PAC visibility. Paul suggested that we co-sponsor two events. The PAC will

share a summary of the action plan on its site and a request will be made to the School Committee to update its procedures to reflect the monthly meetings.

- C. 2015 Parent/Guardian Survey Update
Julie Towell sent the survey link to 1300 parents and guardians. We are looking for a >10% return rate. There have been 56 respondents so far. Some technical issues could be preventing people from responding, as could confusion with the DESE state survey which was released in the same time frame. There was discussion about contacting PTOs to generate more feedback.
- D. Department of Elementary & Secondary Education Parent Involvement Survey
We encourage participation in the DESE survey (Indicator 8) as well.
- E. Dr. Jeff Bostic Presentation on Mental Health June 2nd
Dr. Bostic will be presenting a talk called Building Better Brains at School on Tuesday, June 2nd, in the R.J. Grey Auditorium at 7 p.m. A member suggested that we distribute the parent survey at Dr. Bostic's talk.
- F. Parenting Challenging Children Meeting June 9th
This parent support group will meet on June 9th in West Concord at the Fowler Branch of the Concord Library.
- G. Updates on Other Goals & Priorities for 2015-2016 School Year
We entertained possible priorities for next year. Some topics raised were concerns around social-emotional development and providing better facilitated access to after school programs. Executive function has been voiced as a parent interest to Pupil Services and the Director of Special Education. The PAC supports a formal sequenced skill-building program from elementary through high school. We also raised the topics of training for aides in supporting incidental learning; social groups; and inclusive athletics, art, and music.

Options were discussed for extra-curricular activities. There has been difficulty filling the Community Education classes. Sudbury Recreation has well-identified programs for children with special needs and Concord Recreation has adaptive swimming lessons. A new program for therapeutic horseback riding will be starting in Acton on Nagog Hill Road. NARA has Miracle League. There are other programs through JRI that could combine as after school groups for children with social-emotional needs.

It is estimated that a range of students, including those in the Occupational Development Program, could benefit from a program integrating work opportunities with therapeutic needs. Matching interests to opportunities to develop work skills is key. A parent pointed out that there is a huge demand for people in the high-tech area, especially software testing. If some criteria were reduced, there are students who could participate and would have the skills needed. A supervisor/teacher/trainer would be needed as an intermediary between the students and the employer, perhaps the transition specialist or a counselor. Another possibility is to pair volunteer work with opportunities which also

develop daily living skills, such as preparing and serving community suppers or meals for the elderly.

- H. Annual Meeting & Election – June 10th in R.J. Grey Library at 7:30 p.m.
PAC priorities and goals will be discussed at the annual meeting next month and PAC officers will be elected for the coming academic year. We would like to see positions shared and can accommodate up to three chairs and two secretaries.

IV. New Business – Other topics on people’s minds

The recently passed Autism Omnibus Bill includes a provision for educators to obtain a new autism endorsement. Several AB staff have expressed interest and are expected to gain this credential.

With regard to the open issue of more special education training for staff, there is a push for in-district professional development with special educators and specialists mentoring peers within regular education. It was noted that the state now requires all regular educators participate in a certain number of hours of special education training for their recertification. This is in addition to their ELL training.

The 274 grant for social-emotional programming was received; the funds are paying for Dr. Bostic’s talk among other things. One elementary is evaluating the RULER program from the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence which is aligned to the Common Core. RULER is an acronym for Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing and Regulating emotions. The program is designed to support developing a common vocabulary throughout the school for emotional awareness, to support self-regulation and expression, create a better school climate, reduce anxiety, depression and bullying, and improve engagement and achievement. Schools are updating their crisis response plans. The Director of Special Education is looking into renewing the grant next year.

Discussion ensued on the concerning trends found in the recent Youth Risk Behavior Survey, among them a rise in homelessness and drug use.

- V. Adjournment – A motion was made and upheld to adjourn the meeting at 8:58 p.m.

- VI. Next Meeting – will be on Wednesday June 10th, 2015, at 7:30 p.m. in the R.J. Grey Junior High library.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Sprague, Secretary