



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting

June 10, 2015

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. The following AB SpEd PAC Board members attended the meeting: Amanda Bailey, Bill Guthlein, and Carolyn Sprague. School Committee liaison Paul Murphy and three other PAC members were also in attendance.

II. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from November 19th, 2014, and March 25th, 2015, were reviewed. Minutes from February 25th, 2015, were deferred. A motion was made, seconded, and approved to amend the March minutes. A motion was made to accept the amended March minutes, seconded, and passed unanimously. A motion was made to accept the November minutes as written, seconded, and passed unanimously.

III. Organization/Business Issues

A. 2015 Parent/Guardian Survey Update

About 100 respondents have submitted their surveys. A request came in via the Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN) for translation of the survey into Chinese for a cohort of families. Pupil Services has put us in touch with a translator, but this service may be expensive. It was suggested that perhaps we could make a first pass with Google translator, see if a parent in town will review this translation, and then take it to a professional for polishing. We will follow up with FCSN to see which dialect is required.

B. Dr. Jeff Bostic Presentation on Mental Health

Dr. Bostic's presentation was well attended and appreciated. Slides are available on our website.

C. 2015 Updates on Other Goals & Priorities for 2014-2015

The PAC has been invited to attend the June 25th meeting School Committee meeting to report on progress toward our goals for the year.

Despite transitions within the PAC and Pupil Services, we can count many accomplishments this year. The MCAS analysis provided useful information for discussions on improving student outcomes in 4th and 7th grade ELA as special education students' Student Growth Percentile (SGP) is below the state average. Leslie Laud's Self-Regulated Strategy Development (SRSD) will be implemented to help address this and will provide an opportunity for regular and special education partnership.

A key accomplishment was the publication and presentation of our *Special Education Population Trends Report*, which helped shape the FY16 budget and

outlined how while our overall student population is declining, the number of High Needs Students, including those with disabilities, continues to grow.

Date stamping of hand-delivered documents has been implemented by Pupil Services at the PAC's request.

Parent development opportunities included Kalyani Krishnan presenting on ADHD and executive functioning in January, a Basic Rights workshop cohosted with Pupil Services and the Maynard and Sudbury SEPACs, and Dr. Jeff Bostic's mental health presentation cohosted with Pupil Services. A support group was formed. Professional development took place for PAC leadership. Some of us participated in peer support training through Mass Family TIES. The Interim Director of Pupil Services reached out to the PAC and invited us to participate in a three-day leadership development seminar through FCSN, the Advancing Parent Professional Leadership in Education (APPLE) Institute. We are working on implementing the action plan co-created there.

The PAC was represented in the search committee for a new Director of Pupil Services, and this continued for the Interim candidate process.

The PAC released a new parent survey.

We have made considerable progress reestablishing our relationship with the district and feel we have a strong foundation from which to build. Our district is generally high-performing and many great things are happening. We seek to bring forward our concerns constructively in such a way they can be received and addressed. Both the PAC and the district understandably identify the need to be acknowledged for their accomplishments.

D. Seek Candidates & Elect New Officers

Positions for which candidates were sought included Chair, Past PAC Chair, Secretary, and Standing Committee Chair. Nancy Sherburne volunteered for past PAC Chair and was unanimously voted into office in absentia. A slate of officers was developed and approved. Bill and Amanda were nominated as Chairs and voted unanimously in favor. There were no nominations for Secretary and Standing Committee Chairs, so these positions were tabled until the fall.

E. Possible PAC Goals & Priorities for 2015-2016 School Year

There was a wide-ranging conversation loosely focused on possible goals we can accomplish and priorities to pursue with the district for next year. Some priorities include social emotional programming; continuous elementary through high school executive functioning programming; MCAS ELA growth; and mentoring and internship work opportunities with life skill programs for students in the Occupational Development Program, those with high-functioning autism, and those with social-emotional needs. Additionally, we plan to follow up on the APPLE team plan, staff professional development, and IEP sign off procedures.

Goals for next year will include preparing and presenting the survey results and analyzing the MCAS performance for 2015. Others under discussion include individual outreach; building communication to facilitate parent outreach, PTO and district relations, and effective collaboration; and expanding the diversity of the PAC base, including diversity of disability.

We would like to continue to support parent development through cohosting events. In addition to the Basic Rights workshop, we are considering bringing in Daniel Perlman, reaching out to neighboring towns to complement the talks they are bringing in, and partnering with Pupil Services on topics relevant to the community's needs.

Aligning the integrated preschool program hours remains an open issue that will come up again in the FY17 budget process. There was some discussion surrounding loss of trust on the part of the parents. We recognize that many constraints are active in these decisions and are asking for timely, transparent communication. A parent survey seeking input may be distributed in the fall.

Related to trust, a parent raised the concern that Acton has in some ways a difficult reputation, compounded by losing two cases this year at the BSEA. However, this is to be appreciated against a backdrop of all towns being strained for finances. The PAC continues to encourage people to be thoroughly informed about the special education process and their rights while approaching interactions reasonably and collaboratively. There is optimism that the APPLE experience will continue to foster a positive working relationship between parents and school as improved communication is a targeted goal area. The appointment of the new Director of Special Education is seen as helping ameliorate trust issues.

Also discussed was the issue of inclusion-based approach where needs are met in the classroom versus an approach where the academic support center is considered the least restrictive environment. The integrated preschool model works beautifully; however, there are no co-taught classes from kindergarten up. Pull-out is often the starting point for elementary classes, although push-ins sometimes occur. Many agree that inclusion is desirable, but this would require more special educators to bring the caseloads down first.

Everyone is concerned about class sizes. Co-teaching can be considered from the point of view of bringing down staff-student ratios. Furthermore, in the absence of training to the aides, co-teaching would reduce bullying by providing a second trained adult in the classroom, and the inclusion model has been shown to prevent bullying by normalizing interactions among all kindergarteners.

There are some concerns about how Extended School Year programming participation is being determined and how parents' input as full team members is being considered.

The Emerson Youth Risk Behavior Survey was briefly discussed, noting that the risky and dangerous behaviors are being found at increasingly younger ages. This is an issue for the whole community.

The news that FCSN has posted all its back webinars for free was shared.

- IV. **Adjournment** – A motion was made and upheld to adjourn the meeting at 9:45 pm.
- V. **Next Meeting** – A date and time for the first fall meeting will be determined and announced on the website, our Facebook page, and by email.

Respectfully submitted by Carolyn Sprague, Secretary