



Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting January 13, 2016

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. Co-Chairs Amanda Bailey and Bill Guthlein, Secretary Kathy Luce, Past PAC Chair Nancy Sherburne, and Standing Committee Chair Blossom Davies were present as well as Director of Special Education Mary Emmons, School Committee liaison to the PAC Paul Murphy, and eight other members.

II. Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes from December 16, 2015, were reviewed. A suggestion was made to clarify the language referencing parents and district employees serving on the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services search and to strike the sentence about dyslexia research since it was confusing and the research was dated. Changes will be made as stated before minutes are posted on the PAC site. A motion was made to approve the minutes as amended and was passed unanimously.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Monthly Meetings

The PAC chairs continue to meet with the Director of Special Education monthly. The current major focus is the budget.

B. Special Education Budget

Amanda briefly reviewed the proposed budget items discussed last month—the Pathways program for K-3 Students with autism at Blanchard, adding 0.8 FTE elementary psychologist, adding 2.0 FTE special educators to the junior high, and adding 0.6 elementary special educator slated for Merriam. The PAC will continue to monitor the budget heading into Budget Saturday.

It was mentioned that the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education CPR (Coordinated Program Review) for Acton-Boxborough is slated for 2016-17. The PAC parent/guardian survey results will be included in the documentation for that process.

C. Parent Involvement in Team Placement Decisions

Concerns have been expressed that decisions are being made about placement without parent input, especially at the pre-K and K levels. The PAC questions parents' ability to be full participants at the team meeting to discuss potential placements if they are only allowed to observe resource rooms after placement recommendations have been made by the school team.

D. Parent/Guardian Observation Guidelines

Parents have received different information regarding guidelines for observing proposed placements. The Director of Special Education noted that the guidelines have been clarified and parents should be aware that shorter observations are better. The guidelines and confidentiality waiver will be posted on the PAC site and/or included in the updated Special Education Parent Handbook.

E. Further Discussion of MA Supreme Judicial Court Decision RE: Public Review of Private Settlement Agreements (Champa v. Weston)

Amanda pondered whether as an organization we should request information that would be heavily redacted and not beneficial to our mission. A member noted that individuals can request information if there is a personal need. Past PAC Chair Nancy Sherburne agreed and said she would be interested to see subject areas in aggregate. She noted that another local organization has requested information, incurred substantial fees, and has only received heavily redacted documents. This effort has substantially damaged its relationship with the district. The Director of Special Education noted that it is part of the department's mandate to look at programs and trends of student needs. Nancy said they can continue this conversation in monthly meetings. Members made additional points, one questioning why it would hamper relationships to request information of this nature. Amanda noted that we have one of the more functional PACs in the state and we want to continue the positive working relationship that has been built. School Committee member Paul Murphy noted that he was very concerned about the privacy of individuals, especially those who had signed confidential agreements.

F. Assistant Superintendent for Student Services Search

The committee finalized search interview questions today and eight candidates are slated to be interviewed next week.

G. Parenting Support Hour

Amanda thanked the parents for running the group and noted the next gathering is Wednesday, February 3rd. A member asked what the target audience is for the group. It was noted that it's very open to parents dealing with all types of children. The Director of Special Education asked if it would be good to split the group into older and younger children. A member noted that since the group is small, that wouldn't work yet, and several people affirmed it's great for parents with older children to share their wisdom with parents who have younger ones.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

The Director of Special Education noted that it was exciting to hear school principals talking in support of the special education items in the budget. Paul Murphy said he has a question from a fellow School Committee member about how the additional psychologist time would be used. The Director of Special Education explained that it would be to do assessments (WISC-V) for which the counselors lack the training and background. A member noted widespread parent concerns regarding school psychologists dismissing diagnoses from outside providers. The Director of Special Education said she had never heard of this and noted that she will be meeting with the school psychologists in the coming weeks.

Paul Murphy noted that Acton and Boxborough are holding Special Town Meetings coming up regarding the agreement with Minuteman Regional Vocational School District. The PAC committed to spreading the word about the meetings.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 p.m.

VI. NEXT MEETING – Wednesday, February 10, 2016, at the R.J. Grey Library at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Kathy Luce, Secretary