



## Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

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### Business Meeting September 13, 2017

#### I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. PAC Board Chair Amanda Bailey, Past PAC Chair Bill Guthlein, Standing Committee Chair Blossom Davies, Special Education Director Pam Smith, Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee liaisons to the PAC Diane Baum and Maya Minkin, and ten other community members were present.

#### II. Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes from May 10, 2017, were reviewed. A motion was made and seconded to approve the meeting minutes as written. The motion passed unanimously.

#### III. Organizational/Business Issues

##### A. Monthly Meeting with Special Education Director

Recent staff changes, including the appointment of Interim Superintendent William McAlduff and Acton-Boxborough Regional High School Acting Principal Larry Dorey, were discussed. The district hired Dr. Molly Norton (formerly from Melrose) as an Educational Team Leader for McCarthy-Towne, Merriam, and Douglas. Lynne Laramie will oversee Gates, Conant, Blanchard, and some Out of District placements. Several new Speech Language Pathologists (CCC-SLPs) have been hired to replace outgoing Speech-Language Pathology Assistants. The district also hired a dually-certified Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) CCC-SLP to serve both roles part time. Additional hires were made to complete the Pathways program expansion.

Another topic of discussion was the homework policy, as there appears to be some lack of clarity among staff about implications for students with IEPs. Accommodations and modifications in IEPs, such as providing preview opportunities, supersede the homework policy. This was reiterated by the Special Education Director who stated that she would follow up internally.

Another issue discussed was the right to observe placements. Some parents have reported that requests to observe placements have been denied in the past. Parents have the right to observe placements with timely and sufficient access and should complete the form available from Student Services should they wish to do so.

Finally, the PAC will continue to follow up on parent concerns and questions regarding Extended School Year programming with plans to release the Spring 2017 mini survey report.

##### B. Student Safeguards

Over the summer, the PAC notified families of a recently reported alleged incident eight years ago between a staff member and a student. As the PAC is charged with advising the school district on issues pertaining to the safety of children with special education needs, several steps were taken, including consulting with MassPAC and the Federation for Children with Special Needs. Additionally, PAC leadership met with then Acting

Superintendent Marie Altieri and the Special Education Director regarding district actions. A full investigation was conducted by the district. Current safeguards include CORI checks, fingerprinting, and mandatory reporter training. The PAC was invited to participate in a further review of policies to review student safety. Additional questions should be directed to the Deputy Superintendent.

#### C. Nominations and Electing Additional Officers

The Chair asked for nominations for additional officers and reviewed roles and responsibilities of Chair and Secretary. Melissa Brown nominated herself for the role of Secretary; her nomination was seconded and unanimously approved.

#### D. Accessibility and Inclusion in the School and Community

Some of our buildings were built prior to the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act and are therefore not fully accessible (e.g., classroom sinks, bathrooms). Sometimes classrooms are not fully navigable by students with mobility issues at the start of the school year despite accommodations in the IEPs. A parent asked if the district contracts with specialists regarding ADA compliance for impacted students. The Special Education Director shared that the district contracts with an orientation mobility specialist to do some of this work, and that some issues are not resolved until students are in the actual spaces.

The Chair highlighted the importance of accessibility ('getting in the door') and inclusion ('being asked to participate') in the school and community and noted the importance of adults modeling for and teaching all children to be inclusive of their peers across settings. Consideration of inclusion opportunities in relation to implementation of the Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports was mentioned. The Chair noted that the building project is an important opportunity where the PAC can make recommendations regarding accessibility and inclusivity. The PAC wonders if playground space at an eventual new building would be fully accessible. There is no playground in either Acton or Boxborough that is accessible for students with limited physical mobility. There are also accessibility issues with Community Education. Other opportunities to improve accessibility and inclusion in the community include Acton Recreation and the Acton-Boxborough Family Network, which has recently sought input regarding sensory-friendly activities.

The Chair sought volunteers to form a sub-committee to pursue these opportunities and be a voice for accessibility and inclusion issues; two community members volunteered to join a sub-committee with the Chair.

#### E. Outreach

Upcoming outreach opportunities were noted, including Back to School nights, the district joint PTO/PTF/PTSO meetings, and the Parenting Support Hour (first Sunday of the month from 2:30-4:30 p.m. in the Acton Memorial Library upstairs conference room). Ideally, we would have one PAC representative serve as a liaison to each of the school PTOs as well as someone to attend the Acton Commission on Disabilities meetings (typically the third Tuesday of the month at 9:30 a.m. in the Acton Town Hall). The Commission on Disabilities is particularly important as parents seek to increase town-level opportunities and access. Interested parties should contact the PAC for more information.

The Standing Committee Chair discussed upcoming speakers, including ABRHS transition coordinator Kate Sullivan, who will be presenting at the January PAC meeting. Efforts are

being made to book Brenda Dater from AANE to speak in the spring. The jointly hosted Basic Rights workshop will be held in Sudbury, date to be determined.

The PAC has added an informal coffee/tea hour typically to fall on the Monday after official business meetings from 9:30-11 at a private residence. Interested parties should RSVP to [abspedpac@gmail.com](mailto:abspedpac@gmail.com).

#### **IV. NEW BUSINESS**

A parent raised two issues, the “right to recess” and coteaching. A number of those present expressed that their children had recess withheld as punishment or were kept indoors to finish academic work. The PAC underscored the need for students with certain learning profiles to move in order to be able to self-regulate. The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended that recess should not be removed as punishment or for academic reasons. Parents should review the district wellness policy to see what language is included around recess. Individualized Education Programs can contain language around not removing recess as punishment.

Coteaching was mentioned as a way to build capacity among regular education staff as well as promote inclusion in the classroom. The Special Education Director shared that coteaching is occurring on a limited basis at the high school this year.

A parent expressed the need for more support regarding accessibility and inclusion for her student. The student reports not being fully included in recess and basic classroom opportunities. The parent expressed great concern that her student was told things cannot be made accessible. A discussion ensued regarding lack of education and knowledge district wide regarding inclusive practices and accessibility accommodations, with concerns regarding the implications of this for all students in the district.

Another parent asked about support regarding an assistive communication device. The Special Education Director noted that the district contracts with the Cotting School and CASE for these purposes, and that the parent should follow up with her IEP team.

#### **V. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

#### **VI. NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday, October 4, 2017, at 7:30 p.m. in the RJ Grey Junior High Library

*All AB SpEd PAC meetings are open to the public. We encourage parents of children with special needs and others interested in special education to attend. Please check our website ([www.abspedpac.org](http://www.abspedpac.org)) for information regarding upcoming events.*

*Respectfully submitted by Melissa Brown, Secretary*