Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council

Business Meeting
November 1, 2017

I.   Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. Board Chair Amanda Bailey, Past PAC Chair Bill Guthlein, Secretary Melissa Brown, Special Education Director Pam Smith, and seven other community members were present.

II.   Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes from October 4, 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
The implementation of the new homework policy continues to be discussed. Junior high parents have noted that the Learning Center homework calendar is not always updated to reflect changes made within general education classrooms. The Special Education Director will discuss this issue with the principal and the Educational Team Leader. The PAC continues to stress the junior high team consider how to support executive functioning and self-advocacy skills for this population of students.

The PAC asked how students in substantially separate classrooms are taught health and sex education. The Special Education Director relayed that the district hires a consultant who specializes in this area to teach secondary students this material.

A number of parents from the Early Childhood Program have inquired about program inequities between the Boxborough and Acton preschool sites. Boxborough students have access to music education, physical education, and art, as well as before/after school care via Blanchard's Extended Day program. Students at the Acton site have access to music education only if sufficient funds are raised by the PTO ($6,000-$10,000) and no access to extended day care despite sharing a building with Community Ed. Discussions with Student Services and district administrators are planned. The PAC notes removing these opportunities from the Blanchard Early Childhood Program is not an acceptable solution.

B. MCAS Overview
The results of the 2016-2017 MCAS were recently released. The MCAS was updated last year and includes more questions requiring critical thinking skills. The score thresholds are also different, making comparisons with prior years more complicated. However, interpretation moving forward will be easier using this new method.

Overall, preliminary analyses suggest that the district continues to perform very well, with some areas for growth within certain content areas in specific grades, schools, and/or subgroups. Students with Disabilities in A-B made gains at a higher rate than their counterparts across the state. The PAC will release a report providing information on

MCAS results. The PAC typically meets with the administration to discuss specific areas of concerns regarding the MCAS performance of students with disabilities.

Accommodations in an IEP apply to MCAS testing as long as the testing is not invalidated by the provision of the accommodation. Additional accommodations may also be available. A small number of students with very significant needs take the MCAS Alternate Assessment (MCAS Alt), a portfolio based-assessment with an extremely low passing rate. Passing MCAS in grade ten is required for graduation; districts are responsible for educating students until age 22 regardless of whether or not this threshold is met depending on student goals for life post-transition.

C. Methods for Tracking Progress and Ensuring Accountability in the IEP
The PAC presented other methods parents can use to track student progress, including work samples, report cards, IEP progress reports, anecdotal evidence of skill mastery, formal and informal assessments, and home data collection. Parents can request formal and informal assessments of their student (formative and summative reading assessments, for instance) as part of the student record. Performance Summaries within IEPs should describe current performance level with data. Parents are reminded that they can also note any concerns regarding student progress in the Parent Concerns section of the IEP.

Parents are encouraged to ensure that data on student performance is collected in order to effectively track student progress. More specifically, all goals should be S.M.A.R.T (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) and data on performance should be included in IEP progress reports. It is also important for the team to describe the performance criteria used to track progress. The PAC will summarize these methods of best practice and provide additional resources in an upcoming newsletter.

D. Accessibility & Inclusion in the Schools & Community.
The Acton-Boxborough Family Network (ABFN) Halloween party was a success, with approximately 20 families attending the sensory-friendly portion of the event. The PAC will provide feedback and suggestions for future events at an upcoming ABFN board meeting in a presentation on accessibility and inclusion.

PAC leadership attended the Acton Commission on Disabilities 30-year celebration and encourages parent involvement in creating partnerships with this organization and others in the community (Acton Recreation, ABFN, etc.) to promote greater accessibility and inclusion opportunities.

The Acton town manager search committee is soliciting feedback via an electronic survey from the community. The Acton town manager is also the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) coordinator for the town, responsible for ensuring access to all town-owned spaces, events, and programming.

The Acton Discovery Museum was noted as a community space undergoing major renovations to become fully accessible using universal design principles. A parent noted that they have been very responsive to event feedback from parents. Other inclusive spaces discussed included the Red Raven, which started the Purple Table, a program providing a more predictable environment and additional accommodations when dining out. The Acton Commission on Disabilities has a list of businesses and restaurants that are

disability-friendly. Open Door Theater and Theater with a Twist were also named as local organizations committed to inclusivity.

E. Outreach
The PAC continues to offer a monthly coffee and tea hour to reach parents unable to attend evening meetings.

The next Parenting Support Hour will be 2:30 p.m. on Sunday, November 5, at the Acton Memorial Library.

The Friends of AB SpEd PAC (the 501(c)(3) is looking for officers, volunteers for event planning, and additional members. Membership fees for the school year are $10/person. All funds raised go to support workshops, speaker fees, social events, etc.

Everyone is strongly encouraged to attend the upcoming building forums and the special town meetings in both Acton and Boxborough on December 4 at 7 p.m. to vote on funding the required feasibility study for the school building project. Childcare will be provided.

IV.   New Business
The Arc transition conference was held November 4, 2017. The PAC has transition resources available for interested families. Additionally, the Federation for Children with Special Needs LINK Center has a wealth of information about transition. The A-B high school transition specialist will be attending an upcoming PAC meeting.

The Work Without Limits "Raise the Bar Hire" conference in October focused on increasing the percentage of people with disabilities working.

A parent shared that students in Massachusetts are eligible to attend one or two online, tuition-free public schools, depending on space and ability to implement the IEP.

Some students can be dually-enrolled at community college and high school.

V.   ADJOURNMENT
The meeting adjourned at 9:11 p.m.

VI.   NEXT MEETING AND HOLIDAY POTLUCK
Wednesday, December 6, 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*) for information regarding upcoming events.*

Respectfully submitted by Melissa Brown, Secretary