

Acton-Boxborough Special Education Parent Advisory Council (AB SEPAC)

Business Meeting Minutes April 10, 2019

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. AB SEPAC Co-Chairs Amanda Bailey and Carrie Weaver, Past PAC Chair Bill Guthlein, Secretary Melissa Brown, Superintendent Peter Light, Director of Special Education Pam Smith, School Committee liaisons to the SEPAC Diane Baum and Paul Murphy, and ten other community members were present.

II. Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes from March 6, 2019, were reviewed. A motion was made and seconded to approve the meeting minutes as written. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Welcome and Conversation with Superintendent Peter Light

Superintendent Peter Light was welcomed by the SEPAC and introduced himself. He discussed his previous experience working in a district (Franklin, MA) utilizing an inclusive co-teaching model and hopes to move Acton in that direction. He shared about his entry plan findings report, which is available on the district site and was previously discussed at a SEPAC meeting.

An informal question and answer session followed, where the Superintendent discussed plans to develop more actionable, robust data systems and conduct program evaluations to inform the work of supporting students. The conversation included the importance of training staff in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, particularly as we explore implementing the general education Massachusetts Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) across the district. The SEPAC reiterated concerns about open communication, as parents report that schools are implementing MTSS interventions without parent knowledge. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has advisory materials about parent engagement in the MTSS process.

Parents also expressed concerns around social-emotional development and the importance of ensuring students with disabilities are involved in the full life of the school. Notably, lack of staff support in teaching all students to play and work together, rather than a sole focus on children with IEPs, was cited. The Superintendent expressed his commitment to social-emotional learning and in supporting district staff in modeling and teaching inclusivity across differences for all students.

B. Updates from Monthly Meeting with Director of Special Education

Pam Smith will be leaving at the end of this school year to take over as Director of Student Services in the Leicester Public Schools. The SEPAC thanks her for her support and collaboration during her tenure in A-B. Given the timing of her departure, the district will be hiring an Interim Special Education Director for 2019-2020 before conducting a full search for a permanent hire. The SEPAC will be involved in the search process.

The district is also hiring two elementary Educational Team Leaders, for Merriam/McCarthy Towne and Douglas/Gates.

The importance of open communication and conveying accurate information from administrators and general education staff to families was discussed, particularly for the preschool to kindergarten transition and for initial or additional evaluation requests.

C. Select Parent/Guardian Survey Findings (Formal Report Pending)

A total of 318 students are represented in the survey, which is a response rate of ~30%. Initial findings indicate a high level (85%) of overall satisfaction consistent from 2017. The number of parents/guardians reporting they don't feel they can speak freely with district staff and disagree with their child's special education program or services without negative consequences held steady at 14% from 2017. PowerSchool access is highlighted as an area of concern, as less than half (42%) have successfully accessed special education documents via the portal. Parents shared that documents are difficult to locate, even within the IEP section. Strategies suggested to support families include walking through how to access documents during an IEP meeting and sending an email alert when documents are available. The district will also consider a webinar or video tutorial. 504s have been reported to be missing from the portal. Student Services is following up. The full survey report will be forthcoming.

D. Updates on Selected 2018-2019 Goals & Priorities

1. A joint presentation with the Concord/Concord-Carlisle SEPAC on MCAS: Access & Achievement for Students with Disabilities will be at Concord-Carlisle High School from 6:30-8:30 p.m. on May 14.
2. The updated Parent/Guardian Education Information on the SEPAC site includes links to many webinars and training opportunities. The community and disability resource links will be updated next.

IV. New Business

Student Services has a list and descriptions of all programs and services available to students on their page at abschools.org.

“Intelligent Lives” will be screened in the fall. The May SEPAC meeting has to be postponed; the SEPAC brainstormed speaker topics to occur in place of the original meeting scheduled for May 8.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

VI. NEXT MEETING TBD

All AB SEPAC 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.absepac.org) for information regarding upcoming events.

Respectfully submitted by Melissa Brown, Secretary