

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

Business Meeting Minutes February 12, 2020

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. AB SEPAC Co-Chairs Amanda Bailey and Carrie Weaver, Past PAC Chair Bill Guthlein, Secretary Melissa Brown, School Committee liaisons to the SEPAC Tessa McKinley and Diane Baum, and ten other community members were present.

II. Approval of Minutes

Meeting minutes from January 8, 2020, were reviewed. A motion was made and seconded to approve the meeting minutes as written. The motion passed unanimously, with one abstention.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Updates from Interim Special Education Director

The Interim Special Education Director was unable to attend the meeting.

B. Update on Permanent Special Education Director Search

The search committee for the Special Education Director position has been appointed. Members include three parent/guardian representatives (thirty-five applied and individuals were selected via lottery), SEPAC Co-Chair Amanda Bailey, an elementary principal, the preschool BCBA, elementary and junior high educational team leaders, a psychologist, one special educator, and community member Nancy Duggan. The Deputy Superintendent will lead the committee.

The deadline has been extended to net more applicants. Interviews will begin in March. The SEPAC has requested a public forum to meet finalists and provide feedback to the district, as has occurred previously.

C. February 1, 2020, SEPAC Dyslexia Listening Session & Form Feedback

1. Draft Recommendations

Twelve parents/guardians attended the listening session and another nine responses were recorded via the feedback form. District representation for the listening session included the Superintendent, the Interim Special Education Director, and some special education staff. Both parents/guardians and district personnel report that the experience was positive.

The SEPAC shared a working document of best practices for identifying and working with students with dyslexia. Meeting attendees reviewed the document and offered additional suggestions and revisions. Notably, some of these practices are already occurring across the district and others are occurring at the school or individual level. Parents/guardians report that in some instances specific measures and tests to evaluate for dyslexia must be requested by families. This working document will be available on the SEPAC website and shared with the district and School Committee once finalized. The SEPAC and the district are each following updates from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) regarding dyslexia screening and remediation.

D. Elementary Learning Center Populations from January 25, 2020, School Committee Budget Saturday Presentation

Parents/guardians are encouraged to review the slide deck from Budget Saturday (available on the district website) with particular focus on the distribution of elementary students within Learning Centers per grade. In many schools, the number of students utilizing Learning Centers increases each year, with a significant jump around 3rd grade. It is concerning that some schools appear to be using a “wait to fail model” and are thereby likely not fulfilling Child Find obligations. The SEPAC is still waiting for the findings from the district program evaluation of Learning Centers as part of process monitoring from DESE.

E. Elementary School Improvement Plans & Co-teaching

Parents/guardians are encouraged to run for School Councils (separate from the PTOs and tasked with writing school improvement plans) within their children’s schools. The McCarthy-Towne principal recently presented on the McT school improvement plan to the School Committee, including plans to transition to a co-teaching model to maximize inclusion for students with disabilities in 6th grade. While the SEPAC supports increased access to the general education classroom for students with disabilities, placement decisions are to be made by individual IEP teams. General educators must be appropriately trained to practice co-teaching. The SEPAC has been invited by the principal to observe these co-teaching practices.

F. Mental Health & Crisis Resources

1. Mental Health & the IEP Workshop TBD; Webinar Available

Concerned parents/guardians have contacted the SEPAC regarding ensuring appropriate staff response to a child experiencing an emotional and/or behavioral crisis. Parents/guardians are encouraged to have conversations with their IEP teams and develop a behavior plan as appropriate. As a reminder, mental health resources and supports are available on the district website. Crisis support for mental health is available 24 hours a day through Advocates (800-640-5432).

IV. New Business

Parents/guardians asked about filing with the state if there is a violation with the implementation of an IEP or the evaluation process timeline. An upcoming newsletter will review how to file a complaint (see <http://www.doe.mass.edu/prs/>). You must sign your name to any complaint submitted to the DESE Problem Resolution System Office.

The Past PAC Chair expressed concern about overall district-wide Student Growth Percentiles on MCAS and compiled a working document highlighting particular grades, subjects, and schools with lower than desired growth percentiles. School Committee liaison Diane Baum said that the Student Opportunity Act would ideally provide opportunities to gather data and implement interventions supporting sub-groups of students, including students with disabilities.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:03 p.m.

VI. NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, March 18, at 7:30 p.m. in the RJ Grey Junior High Library

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