

**Business Meeting Agenda**

Wednesday, June 9, 2021, at 7:30 p.m. Virtual Meeting Over Zoom

To attend: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88265343433>

To call in: +1 646 876 9923

Meeting ID: 882 6534 3433

*To be followed by a Friends of AB SEPAC 501(c)(3) meeting*

**I. Call to Order**

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Review and approval of May 19, 2021, meeting minutes

**III. Organization/Business Issues**

- A. Updates from Interim Special Education Director
- B. Review of SEPAC Activities & Priorities from 2020-2021
- C. Seek Nominations & Elect Officers for 2021-2022 School Year
- D. Review & Vote on SEPAC Priorities for 2021-2022 School Year
  - 1. Relationship Building with New Administrators, Families, & Other SEPACs
  - 2. Address & Remove Barriers to SEPAC Participation & SEPAC Leadership
  - 3. Gather Stakeholder Feedback & Make Recommendations Regarding Inclusion for Students Placed in Substantially-Separate Program(s)
  - 4. Continued Advocacy RE: SEPAC Dyslexia Recommendations
  - 5. Monitor Families' Experiences with Extended School Year, Return to School & Pandemic Recovery
  - 6. Workshops on Basic Rights, Post-Secondary Options, Other Topics TBD

**IV. New Business** – Other topics on people's minds

**V. Open Issues**

- A. MCAS performance vulnerable for students with disabilities
- B. Mandatory special education training/professional development for regular and special education staff – hiring dual-certified staff
- C. Increasing opportunities for meaningful inclusion across domains
- D. Enhanced Extended School Year, before-, and after-school programming
- E. Increased use of technology in IEP development, revision, & communication
- F. Following up on communication issues noted as barriers to overall satisfaction and subgroup trends for Out of District, Early Childhood, and Specific Learning Disabilities identified via 2015 and 2017 parent/guardian surveys
- G. Need for consistent K-12 executive functioning curriculum

**VI. Adjournment**

*All AB SEPAC meetings are open to the public. We encourage caregivers of children with disabilities and others interested in special education to attend. See [absepac.org](http://absepac.org) for information regarding upcoming events.*

**VII. Next Meeting TBA**

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

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## **Business Meeting Draft Minutes May 19, 2021**

### **I. Call to Order**

Abe Gutierrez called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. AB SEPAC Co-Chairs Abe Gutierrez, Amanda Bailey, and Carrie Weaver, Interim Director of Special Education Debbie Dixon, School Committee liaison to the SEPAC Diane Baum, and nine other community members were present. The Chairs reviewed remote meeting participation and voting guidelines.

### **II. Approval of Minutes**

Review and approval of meeting minutes from September 16, 2020, and October 14, 2020, was deferred.

### **III. Organizational/Business Issues**

#### **A. Updates from Interim Special Education Director**

Many transition meetings for next fall are taking place. The full return to in-person learning has been largely positive. Students have shown a range of responses. Disciplinary referrals have not increased for students with IEPs since the return.

MCAS occurred remotely for the Remote Learning Program (RLP); the tech, teaching and learning, and RLP staff worked together to provide accommodations. There was an option to forego accommodations or come in person if they could not be provided remotely. The SEPAC asked about iReady accommodations as they didn't universally take place in the fall due to a rapid rollout--there is a difference between universal accessibility features and accommodations. Staff have been advised to provide accommodations. Parents are still encouraged to document those in the IEP as they are not necessarily the same as would be utilized for MCAS. Three data points are required to use the iReady as a tool for measuring progress.

Staffing for next year is ongoing. There is an emphasis on increasing professional staff and reducing paraprofessionals as appropriate. There has been a lot of internal movement, with special educators moving schools and some coordinators changing. Extended School Year (ESY) summer staffing is still in progress. Notice regarding ESY is later than usual. The Interim Director continues to meet with the incoming Director Jennifer Truslow. The new Director is meeting with administrators and doing "talk and walks" to visit programs and get up to speed about dyslexia protocols, program development, etc.

#### **B. Untangling Extended School Year Summer Services, COVID Compensatory Services, and Gen Ed Summer Programs**

Extended School Year summer services look forward to potential regression if there is a gap in services or issues with recoupment. COVID Compensatory Services look backward to what students missed over the pandemic or if new needs have arisen as a result of the pandemic. The Community Ed summer enrichment program is open to all students for a fee--this needs to be accessible to students with disabilities. There is a new Summer

Explorations program for students K-6 recommended by their school as needing social time or help reintegrating to in-person learning. This will be paid for by the district with transportation provided. Special educators or support services will be available as needed. The SEPAC reviewed ESY eligibility guidelines (documented regression, risk of regression, issues with recoupment). COVID Compensatory information is available from DESE.

#### C. Feedback to School Committee by June 4 on District Strategy 2021-2026

The proposed District Strategy 2021-2026 can be found in the School Committee meeting packet for the May 20, 2021, meeting. The SEPAC highlighted aspects of the district strategy related to students with disabilities, intersectionality, and disproportionality. Inclusive practices include representation among staff and instruction materials. Equitable opportunities and outcomes were highlighted during the May SEPAC meeting. There is also an emphasis on social-emotional learning. Knowing what has been done in the past and recognizing ongoing efforts is important when advocating. Tying the SEPAC's asks to existing goals and objectives can help gain traction. Keeping up with School Committee agendas is important as the SEPAC formally advises the School Committee.

#### D. Proposed Revisions to School Committee Policy File: IL Evaluation of the Instructional Program

A policy subcommittee member brought this to the SEPAC's attention. There is a current policy regarding evaluation of the instructional program. The SEPAC exists to participate in the planning, development, and evaluation of the school district's special education programs. The proposed policy language includes the district will conduct evaluations "to complement and augment state and federal policies." The SEPAC exists under state policy and is therefore captured; the SEPAC has an ongoing role. The state Tiered Focus Monitoring process is another mechanism requiring the district to evaluate special education programming. Last year's internal program eval was on social emotional programming. This year the emphasis was Connections/Bridges (autism) programming K-12. The SEPAC needs to know about internal program evaluations and request findings to ask questions and weigh in if necessary. School Committee liaison Diane Baum shared the rationale for the policy revision. The district is adamant MCAS is only one measure of student achievement and growth. Additional feedback on the proposed policy is welcome.

#### E. Feedback & Questions Regarding Full Return to In-Person Learning

The Chairs invited feedback regarding what has worked, what hasn't, and considerations for the fall. Staff and IEP teams have been very responsive to students who are struggling.

#### F. Brainstorm SEPAC Priorities for 2021-2022 School Year

Relationship building will be necessary with a new special education director, four new building leaders (ABRHS, RJ Grey, McCarthy-Towne, and an interim principal at Conant), shifts with special ed staff, and two new School Committee members. The SEPAC will continue to focus on intersectionality and representing needs across disability types. Community outreach is at a critical point. The impact of the pandemic remains unclear.

A parent noted that dyslexia screening is vital, but services also have to exist and be provided with fidelity. The SEPAC dyslexia recommendations can be used to track the district's progress and ensure required resources exist. There has been an uptick in identifying kids and some improvements in IEPs, but there was a wave who were not

identified early. Late identification and learning loss during the pandemic has created anxiety for students. Staff turnover is worrying; hiring staff trained in Wilson Reading and/or Orton Gilligham is a priority for parents. The Interim Director noted the shifts are by staff request.

Another parent asked about students struggling with the return to in-person and academic learning falling by the wayside. Will that be addressed through ESY or COVID Compensatory Services? The interim director recommended working with the team to possibly reevaluate, consider new services, review data, etc. Students are returning with different profiles. When a student began to struggle, before or after the return to in-person, is important. There are many transitions coming up with the end of school, ESY, and the fall. Determining what the student needs now and then forecasting is key. There is not much time to address issues before summer break.

A parent asked how to advocate for changing a program at a school. The SEPAC can meet 1:1 or hold a focus group to understand experiences, establish “the size of the problem,” and plan from there. There is precedence for this with advocacy for a BCBA at the Early Childhood Program. Staff and families often experience the same problem; it just looks different. The Interim Director noted that if problems aren’t known, they can’t be addressed. Another parent shared students in Pathways are at the “back of the building” and their challenges with inclusion. Starting from the Least Restrictive Environment for students assigned substantially separate programs should be a focus. There is also a need to educate nondisabled peers on how to be inclusive. Diane Baum noted in her professional capacity she advises parents to go to their local SEPACs. People should know about the organization and what it does.

The Interim Director suggested a focus on services for college-bound and non-college bound students with disabilities. Transition programs and adult services are difficult to navigate. Planning has to start early. A parent asked if employment is always realistic. Person-centered planning and self determination are key components of transition planning. The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is using the LifeCourse Tools for framing visions and identifying supports. The Arc and DDS are doing a workshop series on how to use them. The Arc biennial transition planning conference is this fall. Caregivers of students 14+ should try to attend.

A Co-Chair identified working with other SEPACs in addition to groups within our community as a priority. There is interest in engaging A-B parents in state-level advocacy. Leadership development is critical.

Some of the current priorities will carry over, such as identifying and removing barriers to BIPOC participation and leadership in the organization, monitoring pandemic recovery, parent/guardian education, etc.

A parent expressed preference for virtual meetings. State guidance is forthcoming. Live streaming is an option. Workshops can be done remotely.

#### **G. Officer Descriptions for SEPAC Annual Meeting & Elections**

The SEPAC can have up to three Chairs and two Secretaries. The Executive Board also

includes Past PAC Chair, one standing committee chair, School Committee representation (non-voting), and relevant school administrators (non-voting). Descriptions are in the by-laws. Critical needs are outreach within the district and to surrounding communities, parent/guardian support, workshop coordination. The parent-to-parent Groups.io list is largely dormant. Other volunteer opportunities exist.

**IV. New Business**

Adam Klein was reelected from Boxborough to a 3-year term on the School Committee. The DEI Family Advisory Parent Co-Chair reached out to the SEPAC regarding special education support for immigrant families. The SEPAC was denied a seat on the DEI Family Advisory body, so this is a welcome connection. We have shared resources from the Federation for Children with Special Needs as a starting point.

**V. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

**VI. Annual Meeting & Officer Elections**

June 9, 2021, at 7:30 p.m. remote meeting via Zoom

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*Respectfully submitted by Amanda Bailey, Co-Chair*