

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

Business Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, February 16, 2022, at 7:30 p.m. Virtual Meeting Over Zoom

To attend: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84512204162>

To call in: +1 646 876 9923

Meeting ID: 845 1220 4162

I. Call to Order

II. Approval of Minutes

Review and approval of December 15, 2021, and January 12, 2022, meeting minutes

III. Organization/Business Issues

- A. Updates from Monthly Meeting with Director of Special Education
 - 1. Extended School Year Information
- B. FY23 Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Proposed Budget
 - 1. Summary of Advocacy to Date
- C. Staffing by Program/Building (See Acton-Boxborough FY23 Budget Binder)
- D. IEP Progress Reporting Consistency
- E. Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) Club Request RE: Student/Family Autism Experience Interviews

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

VII. Next Meeting

Wednesday, March 16, 2022, at 7:30 p.m. Virtual Meeting Over Zoom

**Business Meeting Draft Minutes
December 15, 2021**

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. AB SEPAC Co-Chairs Amanda Bailey, Abe Gutierrez, and Kara Lafferty; Secretary Erica Abbruzzese; Special Education Director Jennifer Truslow; and several members were present.

II. Approval of Minutes

The review and approval of November 17, 2021, meeting minutes was postponed.

III. Organization/Business Issues

A. Updates from Monthly Meeting with Director of Special Education and;

B. Follow Up from Parent/Guardian Conversations

The Director of Special Education relayed that staffing is one of the major topics district wide. Staffing qualified teachers and paraprofessionals is an equal problem. The district is doing everything they can to attract, train, and retain staff. A problem has been attrition due to paraprofessionals obtaining teaching positions. The Director is working collaboratively and proactively with each principal.

K-2 referrals for special education evaluations are markedly up across all schools. Initial evaluations are also up at RJ Grey and ABRHS. Students are dysregulated with lots of big emotions—much of this coincided with initial data collection.

The Director then provided an update on the significant disproportionality finding. The Assistant Superintendent for DEI is attending a meeting later in December and the district will be doing a deep dive with study teams to evaluate how students are being identified and evaluated. The Director said the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has a stringent process when districts are found to be disproportionate and Acton-Boxborough will follow the guidance. Specialized programs need to be well-defined, especially some of the newer programs—everything from who qualifies to how the services are implemented.

The Director then discussed the district's focus on social emotional learning. The Superintendent stated at a community coffee that social emotional well-being is the most important focus right now. All classrooms are in a "low boil." Staff are seeing a lot of aggression and emotional dysregulation. This is a major concern and budget driver to support students and staff before being forced into a reactive state. A-B has a high proportion of psychologists and behaviorists relatively speaking, which is positive. The Director shared school counselors are at recess trying to support kids however they can. She also noted that there is a need to look at how stressed-out staff are and to ensure they have the resources to

support kids. There were spikes in disciplinary referrals at RJ Grey and ABRHS, but those have tapered off a bit.

The SEPAC asked what the organization can do to help. Discussion points: 1) Information gathering regarding what the district is currently doing; 2) Analyzing the proposed budget and how the SEPAC can add value to that process; 3) Making concrete recommendations. Staffing and training are key. The Multi-Tiered System of Support steering committee will be looking at social emotional support, not just academics.

A question was posed about in-person volunteers in the schools and whether visitor restrictions are DESE-driven or district-driven. Other than COVID restrictions, all policies are district-driven regarding volunteers. Discussion ensued around equity with the SEPAC urging that all schools implement volunteer policies equally.

What can the SEPAC do to close the knowledge gap between what's happening at the schools vs. community perception and understanding? Do caregivers know social emotional learning is currently the biggest focus? Ideas include:

- 1) Reinstate parent volunteers (will also help ease the burden given staffing shortages)
- 2) Build in feedback on social emotional initiatives with parent/teacher conferences
- 3) Consolidating mental health resources given difficulty accessing support outside of school (comprehensive resources exist at abschools.org)

The kindergarten transition letter just went out to Early Childhood families. The SEPAC can follow up. Given concern regarding open enrollment and disability-related equity concerns, how is information shared?

School Committee member and liaison to the SEPAC Ben Bloomenthal introduced himself and relayed he looks forward to collaborating with the SEPAC.

C. Current District Administrative Searches

The SEPAC has not been asked to participate in the principal searches for Gates and Conant, which is not consistent with precedent. The SEPAC has requested the names of search committee members and will endeavor to have meaningful disability-focused participation. A seat at the table is critical given institutional knowledge. The SEPAC will continue to focus on relationship building.

D. CASE Collaborative Capital Plan & Proposed Recreation Spaces at Colebrook

The above referenced capital improvement plan and proposed ADA-compliant playground is up for approval at the School Committee as ABRSD is a CASE member district. Co-Chair Lafferty asked if anyone had recommendations for new accessible playgrounds in Acton. North Acton and West Acton need either a new playground or upgrades to existing facilities. Merriam is considered the most

accessible playground in the district. As the town has replaced playgrounds, accessibility has been a priority/focus. ARPA funds are designated for Acton Recreation. Continued advocacy is key.

E. Updates on SEPAC Priorities for 2021-2022

1. Relationship Building – DEI, ELPAC, Families, District, Other SEPACs

The SEPAC appreciates the Director's time to get to know the SEPAC and the community. The SEPAC must cultivate relationships—multiple people need to be working across platforms. The SEPAC sits on the joint PTO and will reach out to PTOs to encourage collaboration. The SEPAC should also connect with the ELPAC. Education regarding the mission and goals of the SEPAC will be a focus. A workshop on the continuum of student support is forthcoming. SEPAC business meetings are back on the district calendar. Staff recognition forms are being received. The Connections program had numerous accolades. The SEPAC will request information be shared at the kindergarten orientation. Social events, surveys, collaborating with the Acton-Boxborough Family Network, and exploring other networking opportunities are ongoing.

2. Workshops

- "Supporting Students" 12/8/21 Recording & Slides Available

- Basic Rights in Special Education and Anti-Bullying Presentations

Suggestions for speakers are encouraged as there is money in the 501c(3) budget. Massachusetts Advocates for Children has an anti-bullying workshop with strategies to proactively address harassment and teasing, not just put the onus on the targeted child. There is a free online support group for siblings of children with behavioral disabilities being offered from UMass Medical.

IV. New Business

There was no new business.

V. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:48 p.m.

VI. Next Meeting

Wednesday, January 12, 2022, at 7:30 p.m. Virtual Meeting Over Zoom

Respectfully submitted by Erica Abbruzzese, Secretary

**Business Meeting Draft Minutes
January 12, 2022**

I. Call to Order

Amanda Bailey called the meeting to order at 7:32 p.m. AB SEPAC Co-Chairs Abe Gutierrez, Amanda Bailey, and Kara Lafferty; Secretary Erica Abbruzzese; Director of Special Education Jennifer Truslow; ABRHS Coordinator Susan Bohmiller; Lucienne Schmidt from the DEI Family Advisory, and eight community members were present.

II. Approval of Minutes

Review of the December 15, 2021, meeting minutes was postponed due to the number of agenda items.

III. Organizational/Business Issues

A. Updates from Monthly Meetings with Special Education Director

1. Significant Disproportionality Update

The district is creating an action plan to address the significant disproportionality finding of Black students being over-identified with communication disabilities. The Director is partnering with the Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning. Data indicated lack of clarity around eligibility and identification. The Multi-Tiered System of Support process will identify the steps to intervene prior to a student being referred for special education evaluation. AB has a consultation with DESE December 16th to outline the plan. Certain grant funds will be used for work with Instructional Support Teams and look at “healthy responsive teaching,” classroom material with diverse representation, and utilizing tools such as iReady and vocabulary curriculum. The SEPAC asked if there is a limitation on IDEA funds being used toward general vs. special education. There are narrow parameters for utilizing the funds for students already identified as needing special ed support. The District is reviewing data and the action plan to identify a broader application of the funds.

2. Timing and Equity Issues RE: Elementary IEP Progress Reports

Some schools have three report cards and therefore three IEP progress reports; others have two. Some schools still haven’t received IEP progress reports. The Director will raise this with the coordinators. The delay until February wasn’t known. A parent asked what home/school reporting looks like districtwide. The Director will bring it up at the next coordinator meeting to achieve better alignment and communication.

3. Extended School Year (ESY) Summer Dates and Planning

The SEPAC has worked with the district to get the dates and programming descriptions out as soon as possible. Summer 2022 ESY will take place July 5th-August 12th (while still individualized for students). DESE guidance was needed regarding pandemic constraints. Staffing will likely be difficult due to teacher retirements, fatigue, and general shortages. Another goal is to have an ESY coordinator so that parents know who to contact with

questions or issues before the first day. A parent asked about COVID Compensatory Services (CCS). Parents should have conversations with their child's team because that's where CCS decisions and recommendations are being made. DESE will continue to update with guidance regarding CCS.

4. District Self-Assessment for Tiered Focused Monitoring.

Every six years districts go through a comprehensive review of special education, civil rights, and English learner policies and programming. The self-assessment looks at specific indicators such as proper documentation, reviewing written policies, and programming for English learners. It needs to be submitted just before the end of the school year. When DESE comes for their site visit they use the self-assessment to decide what they will focus on. There will be a survey sent to parents as part of this process. On the state website there is some guidance for parents around the site visit during the 2022-2023 school year. It will include interviews, including with SEPAC officers. The process is beneficial to not only identify areas that are exemplary but also areas that are either deficient or could use improvement.

5. Proposed FY23 Budget

The proposed budget will be presented to the School Committee 1/13/22. Special education-related items can be found in the SEPAC newsletter, on the SEPAC Facebook page, on the District's website, and through a link in the agenda for today's meeting. Specific to FY2023 the district will focus on disproportionate outcomes for students in the "high needs" subgroup, post-COVID recovery support, and services. The district ranks "must happen" vs. "would like to happen" (Tier 1 vs. Tier 2) budget asks. These are outlined in the proposal. The Director reviewed specialized program coordination and the need to have a 1:1 ratio at a particular school. Currently it is 2:1. A question was asked regarding caseload vs. workload with regard to the additional coordinator proposal. They are looking at the needs of the staff and students as well as the size of the school and the level of need at each specialized program. The schools will be staffed, not just the programs. A parent asked what the role is of the special education coordinator. They supervise staff, support the administrative team within the building, and manage the initial- and three-year evaluation processes. They also coordinate communication with families and support general education teachers. A parent asked the difference between coordinators vs. coaches. Special education coaches are focused on the general education curriculum or supporting a general education teacher to differentiate across all children in their classroom. A parent asked what the district is doing to have a systematic and consistent reading, phonics, and writing curriculum. A conversation regarding the consistency of availability and access to decodable texts ensued. There may be too much discretion at each school as to decodable book purchase and access. They are talking about this across the district and with Teaching & Learning.

6. Proposed Budget Reductions

Concerning reductions include eliminating the Assistant Superintendent for DEI. These responsibilities will need to be reallocated to other admins as they cannot be shifted to the Director of Special Education. Also concerning is the proposal to eliminate one full-time special education teacher. Reductions are being proposed at the learning center level, not at the program level. The SEPAC noted in order to implement co-teaching, the district had

hired more special educators. How does eliminating a special educator move toward that goal? The district is looking at groupings, placing more students in classrooms with similar profiles and similar needs to be more “efficient” with special educators. The SEPAC shared parents report supplementing through private services as students’ needs aren’t always fully met in school, particularly parents of students with dyslexia. The district believes they can still meet all students’ needs with this proposed reduction. There are ongoing conversations regarding ensuring programming is fluid at the secondary level as the elementary kids move up. They will continue to watch special education teachers’ burden with the quantity of evaluations as a result of the pandemic. The Director will follow up regarding the number of co-taught classes and a breakdown of certified staff to paras. Data on the number of students with disabilities is reported by DESE every October 1st.

B. ABRSD Protocols for Responding to Incidents Involving Hate or Bias

The SEPAC was not listed as a stakeholder and was not asked to provide feedback on the protocols. The SEPAC received an apology and has been asked for input prior to the 1/27/22 School Committee meeting. ABRSD explicitly includes disability as a protected category.

1. Re-establishing SEPAC Involvement in District Initiatives

There is a broader issue of the AB SEPAC not being brought in up front as a stakeholder. The district strategic plan is another example of this; SEPAC leadership requested the SEPAC (and the ELPAC) be noted in the plan. They were added after the fact. How can the School Committee help the SEPAC to re-engage? The DEI Family Advisory was told not to directly contact staff, which is concerning. The SEPAC requested and was denied a seat on the DEI Family Advisory. There used to be a SEPAC update at every School Committee meeting. The Student Advisory Council is on the School Committee agendas. Advocacy may take place regarding the SEPAC, DEI Family Advisory, and the ELPAC, requesting that all future district-wide initiatives include those stakeholders.

C. Facilitating Home-School Communication

Examples of communication logs were presented. Communication can be written into IEPs in accommodations, the delivery grid, and Additional Information. The SEPAC noted the importance of balancing staff demands with meaningful communication that will be a value-add to caregivers and the team.

D. Extended School Year FAQ

The SEPAC publishes its FAQ regarding ESY advocacy each year.

E. Acton Town Election - School Committee Seats (2)

Our families need representation and allies on the School Committee. Per our bylaws, the SEPAC does not campaign on behalf of or in opposition to candidates for public office.

IV. New Business/Questions

A parent asked what reading monitoring tools are being used in the district. iReady, Foundations, and the Abound app were noted. The Director will reach out to the Assistant

Superintendent for Teaching and Learning to get a chart for feedback.

V. Adjournment


The meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

VI. Next Meeting

Wednesday, February 16, 2022, at 7:30 p.m. Virtual Meeting Over Zoom

All AB SEPAC meetings are open to the public. We encourage caregivers of children with disabilities and others interested in special education to attend. Please check our website (www.absepac.org) for information regarding upcoming events.

Respectfully submitted by Erica Abbruzzese, Secretary



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

Business Meeting

February 16, 2022

I. Call to Order

Virtual Meeting Participation

- SEPAC meetings are public
- Participation may not take place via the chat box
- Votes will be conducted by roll call
- To be recognized by the Chairs, please use the raise hand function in the Participants window



Our Mission

**To ensure understanding, respect, support,
and the appropriate education of all children in our community.**

The Special Education Parent Advisory Council's
duties under state law include:

“advising the district on matters that pertain to the education and safety of students with disabilities and meeting regularly with school officials to participate in the planning, development and evaluation of the school district’s special education programs.”

II. Approval of Minutes

- Review and approval of December 15, 2021, and January 12, 2022, meeting minutes (available at absepac.org)
- We will **vote to approve the minutes as written or amended** if necessary
- Voting will be by roll call
- If you are not a voting member (parent/guardian of a child with a disability residing or attending school in Acton or Boxborough), please ABSTAIN

III. Organization/Business Issues

- A. Updates from Monthly Meeting with Director of Special Education
 - 1. Extended School Year Information
- B. FY23 Acton-Boxborough Regional School District Proposed Budget
 - 1. Summary of Advocacy to Date
- C. Staffing by Program/Building (See ABRSD FY23 Budget Binder)
- D. IEP Progress Reporting Consistency
- E. Health Occupation Students of America (HOSA) Club Request
RE: Student/Family Autism Experience Interviews

A. Updates from Monthly Meeting with Director of Special Education

- Staffing update
- Extended School Year summer dates and planning

Standing issues:

- Update regarding significant disproportionality finding regarding Black students overidentified with communication disabilities
- State Tiered Focus Monitoring district self-assessment
- Specialized program definitions and review

B. FY23 ABRSD Proposed Budget

- The School Committee FY23 comprehensive budget presentation is 2/17/22 at 6 p.m. with **participation in person only**
- Among the ongoing budget guidelines:
 - *“Prioritize student needs in alignment with the District’s Strategic Plan and Goals”*
 - *“Prioritize funding for programs that support: students with IEPs ...”*
- Among the FY23-specific budget guidelines:
 - *“Address disproportionate outcomes for students in high needs subgroups”*
 - *“Ensure that effective post-COVID recovery services and supports are in place for students’ social-emotional and academic needs and who may have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and school closures”*

ABRSD Leadership Guiding Questions

- *Who are our most vulnerable students and families?*
- *How are they doing and what do they need from us?*
- *What do you think they will need most next year?*
- *Will this decision significantly advance, maintain or limit our work in creating more equitable and inclusive schools and classrooms?*
- *Who will be served by this decision? How will our most vulnerable students and families benefit from this?*
- *What will our staff need in order to help them with this?*

Proposed Needs

NOTE: THIS MEETING IS BEING RECORDED

ABRSD

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Identification of Budget Additions/Critical Needs

Leadership Team evaluated all requests from buildings and departments using a rubric to develop consensus of critical needs

- 1 - Non-negotiable, must be included
- 2 - Urgent & Strategic need even if this requires other reductions
- 3 - Urgent OR Strategic Need, consider other reductions
- 4 - Important, but may be deferred until later time
- 5 - Important, but not supported at this time

Only requests ranked 1 or 2 were included in budget requests

WELLNESS • EQUITY • ENGAGEMENT

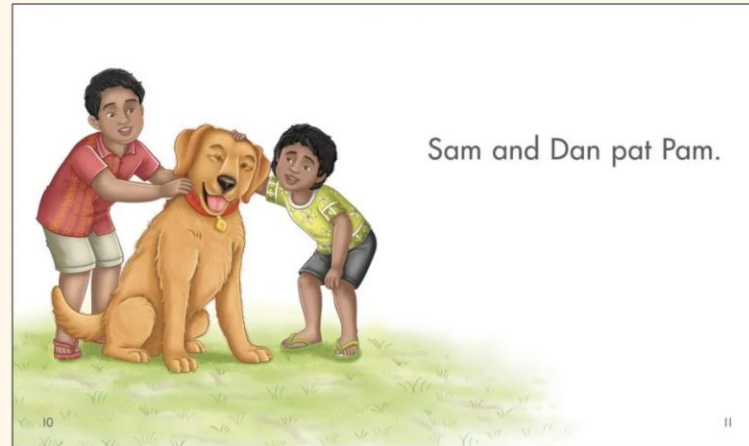
Proposed Needs

Among the level 2 urgent and strategic needs:

- + Literacy Coach for McCarthy-Towne/Merriam
- + Early literacy resources (decodable texts)
- + Increase Special Education Coordinator to 1.0 in two schools (Blanchard +1)

Example of a Level 1 Decodable Text

All words are decodable if the child knows the sounds for: s a t p i n m d



Proposed Reductions

NOTE: THIS MEETING IS BEING RECORDED

ABRSD

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Proposed Reductions to Balance Budget

Leadership Team engaged in activity similar to that used when considering budget critical and strategic needs.

- 1 - Non-negotiable, will be eliminated
- 2 - Does not create inequities for student or alter strategic direction of the district; may reduce inequities
- 3 - Does not create inequities for students, minor impact to the strategic direction of the district
- 4 - Likely to result in inequities for students and families or will have significant impact on strategic direction of the district
- 5 - Will create significant inequities and significantly alter the strategic direction of the district

Final determinations made by Superintendent after input from Leadership Team.

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Proposed Reductions

Among the proposed level 1 reductions:

- 1.0 Assistant Superintendent of Schools for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

There is a proposal to re-add this to the budget as a Director-level position

Among the proposed level 2 reductions:

- 1.0 Elementary Special Educator

There is an option to retain this position and reallocate the resource

Advocacy to Date

- The SEPAC does not want a precedent where special ed is considered in Tier 1 or Tier 2 cuts, particularly not with the pandemic
- Advocacy efforts have included community education regarding the proposed budget via the SEPAC newsletter and social media, letters from SEPAC leadership to the ABRSC, and comment during ABRSC meetings
- Several School Committee members have voiced their support to retain the special educator position; they have yet to vote

RELATIONSHIPS ARE CRITICAL

Declining Percentage of Students with IEPs

Percentage of ABRSD SWD:

2014-2015	.....	17%
2015-2016	.....	16.9%
2016-2017	.....	16.4%
2017-2018	.....	15.6%
2018-2019	.....	16%
2019-2020	.....	15.7%
2020-2021	.....	15%
2021-2022	.....	14.7%

Even with declining enrollment, the percentage of the student body with IEPs should remain steady

Statewide, students with IEPs are 18.9% of the total student population

C. Staffing by Program/Building




- Information available in the [FY23 ABRSD budget binder](#) on the School Committee site; important to track this over time
- Information to be presented at the 1/17/22 School Committee budget meeting
- Details shared [1/25/20](#) by the former Interim Director of Special Education revealed concerning patterns regarding student populations in Learning Centers

D. IEP Progress Reporting Consistency

PROGRESS REPORT INFORMATION		
Progress Report Date: _____	Progress Report # _____	of _____
<hr/>		
<small>Progress Reports are required to be sent to parents at least as often as parents are informed of their nondisabled children's progress. Each progress report must describe the student's progress toward meeting each annual goal.</small>		

- Some elementary schools are only issuing their first IEP progress reports for 2021-2022 now
- Concerns regarding consistency of reporting as well as quality of summaries and data shared
- Some caregivers don't know how to interpret IEP progress reports or align them with other information (iReady, report cards, etc.); issues regarding access via PowerSchool previously reported
- Staff will take this up over the summer

E. HOSA Club Request for Student/Family Autism Experience Interviews

- [HOSA](#) promotes “interest in health sciences through competitive events, community service, and other educational opportunities” 
- ABRHS chapter asked for help conducting interviews regarding health disparities and how the school environment affects students with Autism
- Is this something the SEPAC is interested in supporting?
 - Should the SEPAC have a policy regarding these kinds of requests?
 - District has a policy and procedure regarding educational research ([ILE](#) & [ILE-R](#))

NOTE: THIS MEETING IS BEING RECORDED

IV. New Business

Other topics on
people's minds

Acton-Boxborough SEPAC
abrsdsepac@gmail.com



More Information

DESE Info to Special Education Directors
doe.mass.edu/covid19/sped.html

Mass Advocates for Children (MAC)
massadvocates.org/covid19

Special Needs Advocacy Network (SPaN)
spanmass.org/covid-19.html

Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN)
fcsn.org

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

- We will **vote to adjourn the meeting**
- Voting will be by roll call
- If you are not a voting member (parent/guardian of a child with a disability residing or attending school in Acton or Boxborough), please ABSTAIN

Next Meeting March 16, 2021, 7:30 p.m.
Meeting Recordings Available @ absepac.org

Thanks & Contact Information

Our thanks to Director of Special Education Jen Truslow
and the Acton-Boxborough Regional School Committee for their
ongoing collaboration

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